

North Carolina Literary Hall of Fame

established May 18, 1996

2010 Induction Ceremony
October 17, 2010



Weymouth Center for the Arts & Humanities
Southern Pines, North Carolina

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2010

North Carolina Literary Hall of Fame



2010 Inductees

W. J. Cash

Allan Gurganus

Robert Morgan

Walter Hines Page

Samm-Art Williams

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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North Carolina Literary Hall of Fame 2010

INDUCTION CEREMONY

Sunday, October 17, 2010

WELCOME

Mabel Barker

President, Friends of Weymouth

J. Peder Zane

Master of Ceremonies

Deputy Secretary Melanie R. Soles

North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources

INDUCTION

W. J. CASH

Presented by Ed Williams`

Induction accepted by Paul Escott

WALTER HINES PAGE

Presented by Shippen Page

Reading by Stephen E. Smith

ALLAN GURGANUS

Presented by Jane Holding

ROBERT MORGAN

Presented by Joe Flora

SAMM-ART WILLIAMS

Presented by Asabi (Stephanie Howard)

RECOGNITION OF AWARD'S ARTIST

Marsha Warren

Executive Director, Paul Green Foundation

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Reception to follow



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FOREWORD

WEYMOUTH, WRITERS AND WORDS

It is a sturdy house, well over 100 years old now and still rising among glossy magnolias and tall pines which lean into the Carolina wind. Its elegance is understated, with none of the ostentation one might expect of a twenty-room house. Weymouth served the Boyd family well for many years; since 1977 its service has expanded beyond family to community, its mission marked by the good taste which distinguishes its architectural design.

During the 1890s, James Boyd, a steel and railroad magnate, purchased 1,200 acres in Southern Pines and built a home. He christened this new estate "Weymouth," after a town he had visited in England. Set amidst a magnificent stand of virgin long-leaf pines, it served as a country manor where his grandson and namesake, James, often came as a boy to repair frail health and explore the imposing pine forest and surrounding countryside.

Later young James went to Princeton and then on to Cambridge to earn a master's degree. Rejected by the National Guard for health reasons, James went to work for Doubleday Page Company in New York in 1916. The following year he and his new bride, the former Katharine Lamont, spent their honeymoon in the house, but by spring 1918 he did receive a commission and went to serve in the Army Ambulance Service in Italy until 1919 when he was discharged because of his health. Returning to Weymouth, which by now he co-owned with his brother, Jackson, he and Katharine began redesigning the house. They moved part of the original house across Connecticut Avenue to become part of Jackson's new home, now known as the Campbell House. To the remaining structure, they added a second story and two wings, enlarging the Georgian-style house to 9,000 square feet.

James Boyd, now 34 years old, left the management of the family business to his brother while he pursued the dream which had begun when he was editor of his high school newspaper: to become a writer. Boyd's biographer, David Whisnant, observes that Boyd chose to live in Southern Pines because this site "seemed to offer the best conditions for beginning [a literary career]—a reasonable physical comfort, freedom from distractions, and a mild climate...and an opportunity to affirm the tangible values of American life." One of the earliest visitors to the newly-enlarged home was British novelist and playwright John Galsworthy, who, after reading Boyd's stories, encouraged him to try a novel, then, on a trip to New York, urged publishers to "keep an eye on James Boyd." In 1925, Scribner's published Boyd's first novel, *Drums*. It won immediate attention, not only for its

story but for its realism—the result of Boyd's extensive and meticulous research.

Boyd went on to write more novels, a number of short stories and a collection of poetry. In 1941, he expanded his career by purchasing and editing the Southern Pines *Pilot*. Meanwhile, his home became a welcome retreat for many of the best writers of the day: Thomas Wolfe, F. Scott Fitzgerald, William Faulkner, Laurence Stallings, Sherwood Anderson, and Paul Green, as well as his editor, the legendary Maxwell Perkins, and his illustrator, N.C. Wyeth. His daughter, Nancy Sokoloff, once recalled that "During my father's lifetime there were no 'writers' colonies.' Our living room and that of Paul and Elizabeth Green served as settings for serious work and conversations about Southern writing and its future."

The serious conversations went beyond literature. During World War II, Boyd organized and served as the National Chairman of the Free Company of Players, a group of writers who were concerned that constitutional rights might be compromised during the frenzy of wartime. Among the writers joining him in writing plays for broadcast over national radio were Orson Welles, Paul Green, Archibald MacLeish, and Stephen Vincent Benet.

In 1944, after James Boyd's untimely death, Katharine continued living at Weymouth and publishing *The Pilot*. She and her children donated 400 pine-filled acres to the state for development into the Weymouth Woods Nature Preserve. When she died in 1974, she left the house, remaining land and forest to Sandhills Community College. But, unable to efficiently use the property, the College put it on the market. Fearful that this treasure would be demolished by developers, two friends of the Boyds undertook the task of saving it. Elizabeth Stevenson (Buffie) Ives organized Friends of Weymouth; Sam Ragan, then publisher and editor of *The Pilot*, rallied support from the State of North Carolina, the Nature Conservancy, the Sierra Club, the North Carolina Writers' Conference, and the North Carolina Poetry Society. The first person Ragan approached, playwright Paul Green, made the first donation: \$1,000. Later, Moore County resident Bob Drummond provided a major boost with an initial contribution of \$20,000 and a later donation of an equal amount.

On February 15, 1977, Friends of Weymouth, Inc. was incorporated and the house, surrounded by twenty-two acres, has flourished as a full-fledged cultural center ever since. College groups and various arts groups hold meetings and retreats here. The great room and back lawn host concerts by chamber music groups and such notables as Doc Watson and lectures by speakers as varied as social critic Tom Wolfe and sociologist John Shelton Reed. There have also been frequent readings by North Carolina writers such as Clyde Edgerton, Kaye Gibbons and Shelby Stephenson, as well as an annual Sam Ragan Poetry Festival the 2nd Saturday in March.

In addition to formal programs, Weymouth has hosted one of former North Carolina Poet Laureate Sam Ragan's favorite projects: residencies offering writers, artists and composers stays of up to two weeks to pursue their art in James Boyd's hospitable home. Poet and novelist Guy Owen was the first writer-in-residence, and, just a few months before his death in 1981, he also made his last public reading at Weymouth. Since 1979, hundreds of writers and artists have held residencies here. Many testify that their art has flourished on this site; some even credit the hovering spirit of James Boyd and perhaps those of his many literary guests with providing additional creative impetus.

It is fitting that Weymouth, where James Boyd and hundreds of other writers have found congenial conditions for their work, is the site of the North Carolina Literary Hall of Fame. It is also fitting that the space set aside for this distinction is Boyd's upstairs study, where James did his own writing, often by dictating to a stenographer as he paced back and forth, taking on the voices of his characters. Perhaps the spirits of those who are honored here will join the chorus of literary masters whose influence echoes through the halls and across the grounds of Weymouth.

SALLY BUCKNER
RALEIGH, NORTH CAROLINA

INTRODUCTION

And down the centuries that wait ahead there'll be some whisper of our name, some mention and devotion to the dream that brought us here.

— The Lost Colony by Paul Green

From its earliest days, North Carolina has been blessed with the “mention and devotion” of a great host of writers living and working in the state. A rich literary heritage is a legacy cherished by all North Carolinians.

The North Carolina Literary Hall of Fame is established as a perpetual opportunity to remember, honor and celebrate that heritage. By marking the contribution of its literary giants of every generation, it will support and encourage the further flourishing of excellent literature in the state.

The North Carolina Literary Hall of Fame was the dream of a generation of the state's most dedicated cultural leaders, mobilized by Sam Ragan, former poet laureate of North Carolina. It was authorized by a Joint Resolution of the General Assembly on July 23, 1993, then formally established by a grant from the N.C. Department of Cultural Resources to the North Carolina Writers' Network, a literary organization serving writers and readers across the state since 1985.

The Hall of Fame is physically located in a notable shrine of North Carolina writing. The Weymouth Center for the Arts & Humanities in Southern Pines is the former home and workplace of novelist James Boyd and his wife Katharine, a distinguished journalist and patron of the arts. The large room where plaques, pictures, books and other memorabilia of the state's honored writers are displayed was Boyd's workroom.

Members of the Hall of Fame are selected by a committee of writers. The goal is to choose widely and inclusively from the great parade of novelists, poets, short story writers, playwrights, journalists and storytellers of all sorts who have called themselves North Carolinians. While the first year honored only those from the past, the Hall of Fame now joins other notable cultural award programs in honoring living writers.

In the 1920s, an editor visiting North Carolina marveled at the literary liveliness of the place where, she said, writers flourished in “an atmosphere of plain living and high thinking that I never experienced before.”

In the spirit of those who over the centuries have graced North Carolina with a literature of such quality, beauty and power, the North Carolina Literary Hall of Fame proudly honors writers who have achieved enduring stature in their mention and devotion to their art and to the state.

ROY PARKER, JR.

FAYETTEVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA

North Carolina Literary Hall of Fame

Inductee Awards by North Carolina Artists

2010 ARTIST

Jim Wallace has been a wood worker and co-owner of New Light Wood Works for 34 years. His work has been shown at numerous galleries and craft shows throughout the area, including the North Carolina Museum of Art, the North Carolina Museum of History, Green Hill Center for North Carolina Art, Alamance County Arts Council, and Craft House. He was a member and officer of Chinaberry Craft Co-op in Chapel Hill and is a past member and officer of Carolina Designer Craftsmen Guild. He has exhibited at the American Crafts Council's Winter Market and his work has appeared in *American Craft* magazine. Jim has been teaching woodturning at Alamance Community College and at the Craft Center at North Carolina State University for over 25 years.

Featured Artists

1996 Katherine Kubel. Chapel Hill graphic designer. Gold wooden frame with multiple openings for pictures and text.

1997 Sally Prang. Chapel Hill ceramic artist. Brightly colored ceramic vase mounted on black stand.

1998 Cathy Kiffney. Chapel Hill ceramic artist. Ceramic wall plaque with white magnolia and green leaves.

2000 Tom Spleth. Raleigh potter and ceramist. Garden-tile vertical box sculptures in N.C. colors for the sea, pines and clay.

2002 Ben Owen, III. Seagrove potter. Vases with signature glazes of vibrant reds, jade greens and traditional earth tones.

2004 Jeanette Sheehan. Southern Pines visual artist. Print of original water color painting of Weymouth.

2006 Janet Resnik. Chapel Hill potter. Large oval ceramic tray with Weymouth house and gardens motif.

2008 Carolyn Allen. Graham stained glass designer. Stained glass with piece featuring Weymouth's water lily pond design.

2010 Jim Wallace. Wake Forest wood turner. One-of-a kind hand-turned bowls highlighting the unique and various wood grains.

North Carolina Literary Hall of Fame

Inductees 1996-2010

A. R. AMMONS, 2000	JOSEPH MITCHELL, 1997
JAMES APPLEWHITE, 2008	ROBERT MORGAN, 2010
GERALD BARRAX, 2006	PAULI MURRAY 1998
DORIS BETTS, 2004	GUY OWEN, 1996
LEGETTE BLYTHE, 2002	WALTER HINES PAGE, 2010
JAMES BOYD, 1996	FRANCES GRAY PATTON, 1997
W. J. CASH, 2010	WILLIAM SYDNEY PORTER (O. HENRY), 1996
FRED CHAPPELL, 2006	WILLIAM S. POWELL, 2008
CHARLES W. CHESNUTT, 1996	REYNOLDS PRICE, 2002
JONATHAN DANIELS, 1996	SAM RAGAN, 1997
OLIVE TILFORD DARGAN, 2000	CHRISTIAN REID, 2002
BURKE DAVIS, 2000	GLEN ROUNDS, 2002
WILMA DYKEMAN, 1998	ROBERT RUARK, 2000
JOHN EHLE, 1997	LOUIS RUBIN, 1997
INGLIS FLETCHER, 1996	LEE SMITH, 2008
JOHN HOPE FRANKLIN, 1998	ELIZABETH SPENCER, 2002
PAUL GREEN, 1996	ELIZABETH DANIELS SQUIRE, 2006
ALLAN GURGANUS, 2010	THAD STEM, JR., 1996
BERNICE KELLY HARRIS, 1996	RICHARD WALSER, 1996
GEORGE MOSES HORTON, 1996	MANLY WADE WELLMAN, 1996
HARRIET ANN JACOBS, 1997	TOM WICKER, 2004
RANDALL JARRELL, 1996	JONATHAN WILLIAMS, 1998
GERALD JOHNSON, 1996	SAMM-ART WILLIAMS, 2010
JAEMS MCGIRT, 2004	THOMAS WOLFE, 1996
JOHN CHARLES MCNEILL, 1998	



W. J. CASH 1900 - 1941

One biographer of W.J. Cash has described *The Mind of the South* as “the fruit of a lifetime’s search by a sensitive soul who strove to ‘understand’ his native South.” Indeed in his short life, the writer and journalist expended much ink taking on the oft-accepted and, to his mind, much romanticized history of the South. Whether as an editorialist for his college newspaper, a columnist for the *Charlotte News* or an essayist for the *American Mercury*, Cash thrilled in skewering hypocrisy and delighted in turning a good phrase. Southern politicians, bloviated writers and even European despots were all fair game for his swift pen. But Cash’s bold battles in print belied a much greater struggle within his own mind and body. And, in time, those internal wars took a toll – the writer’s death at 41 shrouded in the same controversy he relished in life.

Wilbur Joseph Cash was born on May 2, 1900 in Gaffney, South Carolina – a town dotted with textile mills. Cash’s father, John, ran the company store – a position that placed the Cash family one rung above mill workers on the town’s social ladder and prompted Wilbur’s parents to discourage play with the factory hands’ children. Even without his parents’ admonishment, the young Cash likely would have kept to himself. Shy, retiring and awkward, the child preferred reading to roughhousing with other boys. Recounting his youth in later years, Cash wrote, “I learned to read very early, and it speedily developed into a passion, one which I have never lost. I read tons of trash, but all that was printed was grist to my mill, and so by the early ‘teens I had got through much that was excellent and still more that was astounding pabulum for a child.” Bespectacled at a young age (some said he had ruined his eyes from reading too much) and prone to squinting, Cash earned the nickname Sleepy. The moniker would stick with him into adulthood.

At 13 Cash moved with his family to Boiling Springs, N.C., the small Cleveland County community in which his mother had grown up. While John Cash helped his father-in-law manage a general store, Wilbur attended Boiling Springs High School. The private Baptist high school placed heavy emphasis on Bible study and required students to attend chapel daily. In later years Cash would report that he paid little mind to school and spent most of his time pursuing girls. But, in truth, he was a good student. He excelled at debating and served as an officer in the literary society.

Cash's high school graduation in April 1917 coincided with entrance of the United States into World War I. The young graduate sought to join the Navy. But poor eyesight prevented him doing so. Instead Cash busied himself with a variety of odd jobs, including work as a carpenter's helper and clerk at an Army camp near Spartanburg, S.C. and as a shipyard helper up and down the East Coast. Cash's work outdoors during winter 1917-18 exposed him to frostbite, a condition that left his eyelids slightly, but permanently, narrowed and further reinforced his nickname Sleepy.

Eventually Cash was accepted into the Students' Army Training Corps, a nationwide program established to train college and trade school students in skills deemed necessary for the war effort. For Cash (at least for his father) the program meant Army-paid tuition to Wofford College, a small Methodist school in South Carolina. Cash was not keen to attend college, especially at Wofford, which he viewed as too close to home and too tied to religion. Consequently, after a year in South Carolina, he transferred to Valparaiso College in Indiana. But Cash's time in the Midwest was short-lived. He chose not to return to Valparaiso at the completion of the Christmas break in 1918. The Midwest winter had proved too cold for his Tar Heel blood.

In fall 1918 Cash enrolled at Wake Forest College. Like Wofford the school had a religious affiliation, in this case Baptist. But for Cash, Wake Forest's proximity to Raleigh (the school didn't move to Winston-Salem until 1956) made campus life more bearable. He and his friends often slipped off to the capital city for beers, burlesque shows and to court women from Meredith College.

Cash took his first steps toward the writing life with a poem submitted to the *Wake Forest Student*, the college's literary magazine. His poem "Spring" celebrated the season and equated it with love and kisses. In time, Cash published six other poems and three short stories in the magazine. Cash biographer Bruce Clayton suggests that the short stories, one of which is set aboard a sailing vessel in the Congo, are strongly reminiscent of works by Joseph Conrad, an author Cash was deeply immersed in reading at the time.

Cash also fell under the influence of another writer during his time at Wake Forest. He was a regular reader of essayist H. L. Mencken, whose writings about the South drew extreme reactions from natives of the region. Some loved Mencken. Others loathed him. Cash leaned toward the former reaction. In fact, he penned two columns for the *Old Gold and Black*, the Wake Forest student newspaper, in which he echoed the sentiments and the style of Mencken's expressed seminal essay "The Sahara of the Bozart." In a February 13, 1920 column, Cash wrote that the South was indeed barren of culture and the beaux arts. "And North Carolina comes near being the dreariest spot in the whole blank stretch," he added. "In all the long years of its history the State hasn't produced a half dozen writers who might, by

any sort of standard, be called worthwhile. Worse – it hasn't even raised up readers for books that others have written.” His comments provoked a stream of dissenting letters to the paper – a response that sparked Cash to write a second column a week later in which he lambasted his fellow students for listing *Tarzan* and the *Wild West Magazine* as their favorite reading.

Cash was in his final year at Wake Forest when he wrote his Menckenesque column and, by that time, he had become the associate editor of the *Old Gold and Black*. His responsibilities included writing and editing the editorial page. As an editorial writer, Cash on several occasions came to the defense of Wake Forest president and biologist William Louis Poteat. The college president had come under fire from Baptist fundamentalists for his evolutionist views. Pulling no punches, Cash suggested in one editorial that Poteat's critics were “a few self-anointed bigots.” He wrote that they had been emboldened by “Willie J.” Bryan, who “gets hot over the question of evolution on the ground that he knows quite positively that no one ever fed peanuts through the bars of a cage to his great-great-grandpa.” Cash concluded with an assault on the fundamentalist movement. “Conceived in the slime of ignorance,” he wrote, “it seeks to thwart and retard the march of truth and knowledge by playing upon the fears and superstitions of the credulous and the willful blindness of the prejudiced. What strange instruments does his Satanic Majesty sometimes choose to carry out his work.”

After graduation from Wake Forest in 1922 Cash spent the ensuing few years balancing his desire to write with the need to make money. Seeking to please his father, he enrolled in law school at Wake Forest. But he quit after a year, later labeling law “the dullest of professions.” Next he spent three years teaching, one year at a small-town college in Kentucky and two at a boys' school in Hendersonville, N.C. However, teaching did not suit him, either. He found his colleagues and students uninteresting and the pace of life in small towns tedious. Finally, in May 1925, Cash headed for Chicago where he sought work in journalism, first as a freelancer and then as a staffer on the *Chicago Post*. But the young journalist spent a mere six months in the Windy City before returning to North Carolina – likely driven home by the onset of winter in the Midwest.

Upon returning to North Carolina in early 1926, Cash began work for the *Charlotte News*. He had first worked for the newspaper as a reporter in summer 1923, shortly after abandoning law school. But the job was only a temporary one and, at the end of the summer, he headed for Kentucky and his teaching position.

As he bounced between jobs, Cash also tried his hand at fiction. He submitted short stories to *Harper's* and the *American Mercury*, a monthly magazine edited by Mencken. But neither publication accepted the pieces.

Cash also worked on several novels, ultimately abandoning them after he grew frustrated with his writing.

By all accounts Cash enjoyed his job with the *Charlotte News*. The journalist, whom his colleagues called “Jack,” took special pleasure in the intellectual sparring and teasing between staffers that was a frequent occurrence in the paper’s newsroom. But in early 1927, hardly a year after joining the *News*, Cash retreated to his parent’s home in Boiling Springs. He told them that he was too nervous, depressed and “neurasthenic” to do sustained work.

Health problems had plagued Cash since high school, when he would occasionally experience choking spasms. At Wake Forest he wore his collar open because of a swollen goiter. Ultimately a doctor would attribute Cash’s poor mental and physical health to hyperthyroidism. But Cash had yet to receive the diagnosis in 1927 when he returned to Boiling Springs for rest. At the time a doctor suggested that Cash’s low feelings were due to a thiamine deficiency. In addition to rest, he prescribed distant travel – a move he suggested would allow Cash to forget about his problems. The remedy was common at the time and so Cash’s parents, worried about their son, dutifully cobbled together money to send him to Europe. Cash spent several months traveling through France, England, Italy, Germany and Belgium, often making his way on foot or by bike so that he could save money.

By November 1927 Cash was back in North Carolina and relaxed enough to return to the *Charlotte News* as an editorial writer and occasional book critic. In March 1928 he added to his portfolio a signed weekly column titled “The Moving Row.” In his pieces Cash ranged over such topics as the definition of Americanism, writers’ tendency to romanticize war, art and censorship, and the joys of Parisian life. The journalist had churned out just five “Moving Row” columns when his nervous symptoms reappeared. In early April he resigned from the *News*. He spent a brief period in the hospital in Charlotte and then, again, retreated to Boiling Springs. Through the summer he recuperated by splitting wood and taking long walks, sometimes roaming as much 25 miles in a day.

Cash was sufficiently refreshed in fall 1928 to step in as managing editor for the newly created *Cleveland Press*, a semi-weekly newspaper based in Shelby. For all intents and purposes Cash was the main writer for the eight-page paper. He reported on local events, revived “The Moving Row” column and wrote the paper’s editorials. Cash devoted significant editorial space to the 1928 Presidential campaign, which pitted Republican candidate Herbert Hoover against Democratic candidate Al Smith. The editor was unrelenting in his attacks on those spearheading anti-Smith campaigns in North Carolina, suggesting that religious bigotry lay behind opposition to the New York, Catholic Smith. Cash held up for particular

scorn North Carolina's Methodist and Baptist leaders as well as the Ku Klux Klan.

Cash also used the pages of the *Cleveland Press* to lay into Furnifold M. Simmons, the senior U.S. senator from North Carolina and another of the leaders of anti-Smith forces in the state. Simmons would also prove the subject of Cash's first essay for Mencken's the *American Mercury*. Using the extensive knowledge of Simmons gained during the 1928 campaign, Cash crafted a fiery attack on the Senator in early spring of 1929 and submitted it as an unsolicited manuscript to Mencken. To Cash's surprise, Mencken accepted it and agreed to publish the piece under the title "Jehovah of the Tar Heels" in the *American Mercury*'s July 1929 issue.

Mencken asked Cash for more essays. Consequently, over the ensuing six years, the Tar Heel produced seven more pieces for the *American Mercury*. Cash's essays included a look at the Gastonia textile strikes ("The War in the South", published in February 1930), an examination of the social fabric of Charlotte ("Close View of a Calvinist Lhasa", published in April 1933) and a criticism of James B. "Buck" Duke and Duke University ("Buck Duke's University", published in September 1933).

Cash's *American Mercury* essay on the psychology of Southerners ("The Mind of the South", published in October 1929) attracted the attention of the *Mercury*'s publishers, Alfred and Blanche Knopf. They considered the topic worthy of a book and asked the writer to consider producing one. Cash agreed to the assignment and then struggled for more than a decade to complete it. He bounced between work on the manuscript and churning out columns for the *Charlotte News*, having returned to the paper's employ after about a year of editing the *Cleveland Press*. His pieces for the *News* offered a welcomed distraction from writing the book. He spent weeks at a time producing lists of ideas or drafting chapters, only to tear them up and start over. At times the Knopfs questioned whether they would ever see a final manuscript. But Cash continued to promise a book and ultimately he made good on his agreement, providing his publishers with a completed manuscript in July 1940. *The Mind of the South* was published in February 1941.

The 400-page book explores the development of Southern thought and customs from the arrival of the first European settlers through the rise of industrialization in the early 20th century. Cash suggests that Southerners have held fairly uniform views across the four centuries. *The Mind of the South* challenges both the notion of the South as a land dominated by chivalrous and aristocratic "cavaliers" and as a region ruled by progressive thinkers and industrialists. The "man at the center" of the South is, in fact, the backcountry yeoman farmer, Cash writes. Although the South may include "cavaliers," industrialists and yeoman farmers, the writer suggests that rivalry between such classes is minimized by the "proto-Dorian bond," which unites whites in an effort to dominate blacks.

With its exploration of such themes as the cult of womanhood, violence, paternalism, demagoguery and xenophobia, *The Mind of the South* has stirred much interest over the decades since its publication. The book received mostly laudatory reviews at the time of its release. One of the rare dissenters was poet and Vanderbilt professor Donald Davidson, who criticized Cash for his hostility to religion and his comparison of the Southern mind to Fascism, Stalinism and Nazism. Although noted Southern historian C. Vann Woodward praised the book when it was first published, some 30 years later he revised his opinion. The Yale professor faulted Cash for often speaking too broadly about the South. The Tar Heel writer, Woodward wrote in 1969, failed to include mention of Kentucky's Bluegrass country, the Mississippi Delta, the Ozarks or the Gulf Coast. "Natives of Arkansas, Louisiana and Texas will not find their states in the index of the *Mind*, nor will natives of many other states save North Carolina," he suggested. Woodward also skewered Cash for ignoring significant people and periods in Southern history, including Southern dissenters to slavery, Union sympathizers during the Civil War, Socialists at the turn of the 20th century, and peace activists during World War I.

With an acclaimed book to vouch for his abilities, Cash applied for a Guggenheim fellowship to work on a novel. The writer had applied several times previously for the grant, which promised enough money to allow him to focus exclusively on his fiction writing. But none of his attempts had been successful. In spring 1941 his luck changed and he was awarded a fellowship. Cash chose to head for Mexico City with his new bride Mary. He planned to write a novel about the rise of a wealthy cotton mill family in the piedmont.

On their way to Mexico, the Cashes stopped off in Austin, Texas, where Cash delivered the commencement address at the University of Texas. In his speech "The South in a Changing World," the Tar Heel sounded the alarm about the rise of totalitarianism, particularly in Europe. During the 1930s Cash had penned numerous columns for the *Charlotte News* decrying the actions of Mussolini and Hitler. At times the writer seemed unnaturally fixated on Hitler, launching into violent tirades against the Nazis when meeting friends on the street. By some accounts Cash's reaction to Hitler grew stronger after a night of drinking, an increasingly common occurrence by the late 1930s.

The Cashes arrived in Mexico City in early June 1941. Both were fatigued from travel and nauseated from the heat and high altitude. As the couple settled in to their new home, Cash's mental and physical health continued to decline. On June 30th he became obsessed with delusions that Nazi agents were plotting his death in revenge for his anti-Hitler editorials. The next day he fled his apartment and took a room at a Mexico City hotel. Cash was found dead that night, hanging by a necktie from the bathroom door.

To this day the cause of the Tar Heel writer's death remains unclear. No evidence of Nazi agents was ever found. Mourners at Cash's memorial service in Shelby were told he died of a brain tumor, but an autopsy failed to reveal such. The likely explanation for Cash's death is suicide. But whether the writer was spurred to take his own life as a result of depression, heavy drinking, hyperthyroidism or some other medical condition cannot be known. What is known is best described by Cash biographer Joseph L. Morrison:

He was a truth seeker, this W. J. Cash, whose too-short life yielded one fine book as its only monument. Thoughtful men will continue to honor him in the realization that, like most truth-seekers, W. J. Cash gathered his crumbs and grains of truth at the cost of his bitter toil and agony.

"THE MAKING OF THE SOUTHERN WORLD TO COME"

from The Mind of the South. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1941.

. . . It is far easier, I know, to criticize the failure of the South to face and solve its problems than it is to solve them. Solution is difficult and, for all I know, may be impossible in some cases. But it is clear at least that there is no chance of solving them until there is a leadership which is willing to face them fully and in all their implications, to arouse the people to them, and to try to evolve a comprehensive and adequate means for coping with them. It is the absence of that leadership, and ultimately the failure of any mood of realism, the preference for easy complacency, that I have sought to emphasize here.

• 24 •

This analysis might be carried much farther. But the book is already too long, and so I think I shall leave it at this. The basic picture of the South is here, I believe. And it was that I started out to set down.

Proud, brave, honorable by its lights, courteous, personally generous, loyal, swift to act, often too swift, but signally effective, sometimes terrible, in its action—such was the South at its best. And such at its best it remains today, despite the great falling away in some of its virtues. Violence, intolerance, aversion and suspicion toward new ideas, an incapacity for analysis, an inclination to act from feeling rather than from thought, an exaggerated individualism and a too narrow concept of social responsibility, attachment to fictions and false values, above all too great attachment to racial values and a tendency to justify cruelty and injustice in the name of those values, sentimentality and a lack of realism—these have been its

characteristic vices in the past. And, despite changes for the better, they remain its characteristic vices today.

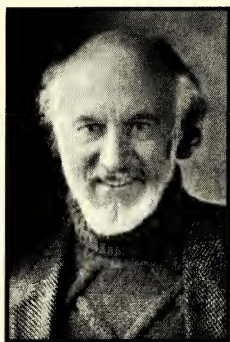
In the coming days, and probably soon, it is likely to have to prove its capacity for adjustment far beyond what has been true in the past. And in that time I shall hope, as its loyal son, that its virtues will tower over and conquer its faults and have the making of the Southern world to come. But of the future I shall venture no definite prophecies. It would be a brave man who would venture them in any case. It would be a madman who would venture them in face of the forces sweeping over the world in the fateful year of 1940.

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ALLAN GURGANUS

b. 1947

“Concerning Allan Gurganus”

by Ilan Dunham

“He works without a safety net: no precautions are taken against pathos, bathos, authorial intervention. As a result, his best stories command a sort of sublimity of the mundane; they locate the dangerous glamour in ordinariness... Gurganus can do anything he likes as a writer.”- Henry Louis Gates, Jr.

“Yes, I write the funniest books possible about the worst things that can happen to people.”

- Allan Gurganus

In one line Allan Gurganus offers his credo. A world view is certainly implied. But can humor fully map the mortal surprises we all dread most? Is History actually funny? This writer’s mission seems based upon a seismic contradiction. Suffering can be rendered with sympathy, but with wit? Are the tribulations of buck-privates and small-town citizens the truest record of a given age?

Such questions abound in the novels, essays and stories of Allan Gurganus. Born in Rocky Mount, North Carolina, in 1947, he has made his state his subject. Over the last three decades, his imaginary Falls, North Carolina, has become a very real locus—a curative destination—for readers in sixteen languages.

Since *The New Yorker* published his first story in 1973, the writer has perfected a lyrical form of historical testimony. Like many other Southerners, his short stories tend to “go long.” In recent years his tales might be characterized as novellas, several of which approach a novel’s length. Many such stories offer us single speakers locked into some personal-historical dilemma. Gurganus has perfected a curious fusion of public events—wars, epidemics, the parade-days of any epoch—with some side-street reality peculiar to the person speaking. Of his *Oldest Living Confederate Widow Tells All*, *The New York Times* wrote simply, “It revises the national epic.” But how?

The writer has sidestepped anything called “historical fiction.” In *Widow*, *The Practical Heart*, and other works set in the nineteenth or early twentieth centuries, history is not visited upon characters’ exteriors like wounds or blows; it instead emerges in a series of expectations,

conventions, confusions. The past seems to emerge from a speaker's very interior.

Gurganus once quipped that he was "bilingual: I still speak Nineteenth Century." He has revealed using Montgomery-Ward catalogues for whatever year he is seeking to portray. The novels and stories can offer a restless shuttling between the sometimes cruel simplifications of a farm village's nineteenth century and the technological uncertainties of the twenty-first. Several stories ("A Hog Loves Its Life") commence with courtship and economic struggles in the rusticated 1880's only to fire forward into some future seeming to shine with promise.

The language that a Gurganus character speaks is naturally vetted for period accuracy, but its tone must first be personal, imbued with the built-in contradictions that vouchsafe any human being. This writer always urges his students to read their work aloud to themselves, then others, "To write out loud." He assures them that all writing is a form of vocal music, whether or not the reader's lips move while consuming printed language. It is evident that the inventor of Confederate widow Lucy Marsden, called by one critic "an American Molly Bloom-Scheherazade," would first honor the aural. Each story must create a new voice in his long gallery of such.

Somehow, unaccountably, the reader finds himself listening through reading. Said reader grows gently implicated, then forcefully button-holed. Some have even reported finding themselves drafted as court-appointed advocates, working pro bono, for Gurganus' multifarious characters. By the end, this writer's best work becomes an ingenious emotional collaboration.

In "Blessed Assurance," a middle-aged white millionaire confides he once sold funeral insurance to ancient black women. Several late-payers he welshed on in exchange for a company bonus; his personal wealth now seems to him founded on one incontrovertible moral lapse. In "It Had Wings," a retired saleswoman, alone at home, discovers a nude male angel unconscious near her backyard picnic table; she somehow helps him aloft. In "He's One, Too," a handsome, married Superintendent of Schools finds himself entrapped on morals charges involving a policeman's young son.

"Behind every fortune there's a crime," Balzac once explained. In Gurganus' moral universe, one act of kindness can prove as dangerous as any seeming misdeed. Given the inverted ethics underwriting such stories, the courage to act becomes itself a ground for accusation. The impulse to take on others' woes means overlooking too many of your own. There's a sense of how official culture too often works at the expense of individual freedom. This awareness makes Gurganus' fiction suspenseful and often surprising. And yet, a certain sensual acceptance of the world yields unexpected rewards. His characters announce hearty appetites and they do enjoy sleep, dreams. Concerted pleasures arrive when least expected and often serve as palliative buffers, transient if erotic compensations. Few

writers working today limn with such precision the pivot-point where private safety ends and public martyrdom commences.

Maybe all this is simply shorthand for Allan Gurganus' vaunted "historical imagination." He has pointed out that all stories are histories, and all participate in one particular period as well as in Time generally. But even his fictions set in contemporary times feel mindful of a ruddering past, aware of whatever period-brackets might eventually come to mute and preserve this particular present-tense.

He was born in the South, educated in Philadelphia, then New York, then Iowa City, then Palo Alto, and often traveled abroad. But it will surprise no one that an author so identified with his native soil must return to it.

"Can't go home again?" he wrote in an essay. "Only a petulant adolescent boy would ever imagine you could leave it!"

Thirty years along, it might prove instructive to look back over Gurganus' output. Enthusiasts have called his work "operatic." They might be referring to its range of memorable emotional peaks. (The burning of the plantation house in *Widow's* "Black, White and Lilac" is sometimes cited as one such high point). But "operatic" also suggests that the prose remains sing-able. It lies within the range of any dimensional professional voice. Gurganus' best arias can yield the immediacy of live theater, a linguistic compression akin to poetry. Twain and Whitman, those most vocal of American voices, have been cited as grandfathers, illustrious points of comparison.

Since the root of the word "vocation" is "voice" itself, most critics agree that Allan Gurganus probably experienced early in life some sort of calling. He is now at work on a long novel, *The Erotic History of a Southern Baptist Church*. It will continue the Falls trilogy begun with *Oldest Living Confederate Widow Tells All*. The writer seems bent on giving voice to every native of his invented village.

The writer has been honored by other writers. His state has offered both its Sir Walter Raleigh Prize and the North Carolina Award. Elected by his nation's artistic peers to the American Academy of Arts and Letters, Gurganus has maintained a serious literary reputation. He is called—in view of his stately output and evident linguistic skills—"a writer's writer." But the novelist has also become, as if by accident, a best-seller in the U.S., Italy, Germany, and England.

Given the oddity and force of his characters' heightened, stylized speech itself, theatrical adaptations were probably inevitable. Films and Broadway have both attempted variations on his textured songs of experience. Adaptations of his work have won four Emmys, luring Academy Award-winning actors like Donald Sutherland, Cecily Tyson, Diane Lane, Anne Bancroft and Ellen Burstyn. But the author has never

been tempted to write for film. His faith in prose narration-about his phantom town of twelve hundred souls, a bird sanctuary-remains unshaken.

Critics have noted his ability to occupy both the open plain of Comedy and the darker forest of Historical Tragedy. Most novelists choose early on either the comic terrain or the other. (Chekhov is one notable exception.) Maybe this co-existent split vision of Gurganus' helps account for some of his work's energy. He seems to write about every kind of person except a passive one; his characters are workers and doers, however misguided. The great-nephew of preachers and the son of a lay-minister, he is plainly intrigued with how man-made rules often tread upon eternal laws. Gurganus, like any decent stand-up-comic, also takes responsibility for his imagination's own admitted excesses. (That, indeed, often provides the very fulcrum of what's funny.)

His language participates in the exaggerations endemic to folk sagas, shaggy dog stories, traveling salesmen's off-color jokes. His tales can seem both bone-true and unmistakably "tall." He has mentioned his high regard for late Flannery O'Connor stories, praising the "conjunction of the most refined theological concern with the very broadest physical comedy."

Empathy is an assumed watchword for all fiction. "Sympathy" means "to react like another." "Empathy" surpasses even that, implying unanimity of response. It suggests a single organism consisting of writer and subject, fused. In Gurganus' work, even the "heavies" (there are no villains) get accorded the same rights and privileges allowed foreground protagonists.

Though he headed to college in Philadelphia at age eighteen, the subject of local small town and rural life seems to have been a source of joy even in his earliest social story-telling. It held pride of place in his first experiments as both a painter and a writer.

After his one year at The Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts and the University of Pennsylvania, he dropped out of school and directly into the path of the Selective Service Act. "They were less than selective in coming after me. I tried resisting going to Vietnam but my Republican parents were all for the military's 'making a man of me.' (Up to and including a dead one, I guess.) So my essays about passivism, my letters from Presbyterian preachers, were first ignored then lost by the Tarboro draft board."

The eighteen-year-old found himself, after a stint with double pneumonia at Great Lakes Naval Training Base, onboard the USS *Yorktown*. That World War II aircraft carrier was now bound for Southeast Asia. It was on this ship, with its full crew of 4,000, that Allan Gurganus, "unable to find the oil painting studio," discovered its library instead. Though he had received a lively public education in Rocky Mount, his truest attentions seem to have been engaged by painting and being Student Body Vice President; that job meant planning weekly assembly programs. "Including a student homage to the Liz Taylor-Richard Burton *Cleopatra*

then being filmed. The football team played shirtless slaves. Our ancient Latin teacher, against all expectations, loved the show. She had never heard of Liz Taylor but she praised our pageant ‘for bringing the classical world terribly alive as never before.’”

Sufficiently bored, Gurganus found himself reduced to reading the very novels whose book reports he had faked in school. Trained as an artist at the old-fashioned Pennsylvania Academy, he began to write using that same apprenticeship through imitation. “I did a Chapter One in the style of Dickens. Another chapter I pushed along with the fresh-laundered efficiency of Jane Austen. By the time I was released after three-and-a-half battleship-gray years, I had saved my mind by giving myself a liberal education. Sarah Lawrence, the future alma mater, awarded me two years’ college credit for the twelve hundred books I’d consumed and reported on during those long months at sea. I was out of faith with the war and my government. But in literature I found a force I could wholeheartedly and forever serve.”

After working with Grace Paley at Sarah Lawrence, Gurganus went on to the classes of John Cheever and Stanley Elkin at the Iowa Writers’ Workshop. From there, he won a Wallace Stegner Fellowship at Stanford. He would move back to North Carolina for a teaching job at Duke University before returning to New York and working at his undergraduate college, Sarah Lawrence. He was awarded tenure there in 1988.

While working as a college teacher at Stanford, Duke, and Sarah Lawrence, Gurganus wrote daily. His stories found their way into Best American Stories and O’Henry Award collections. Knopf eventually offered him a contract for his long work-in-progress *Oldest Living Confederate Widow Tells All*. This 1989 work met with rhapsodic reviews, comparisons to Joyce, Twain, Garcia Marquez.

Widow proved a rarity among books by a white Southerner: it was embraced by the black community. Gloria Naylor, the African American novelist, chose it as a Main Selection of the Book of the Month Club. And part of her citation read, “If the cosmos had been so ordered that William Faulkner and Alice Walker could have collaborated somewhere on a desert island, the result would have been a novel similar to but not quite as good as *Oldest Living Confederate Widow Tells All*. You feel deeply for the book’s Confederate citizens and for their slaves, struggling toward human dignity. Reminiscent of *Absalom, Absalom*, Gurganus’ power is uncanny.”

The novel was followed in 1991 by a group of stories and novellas, *White People*, which won the *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize for Best Work of American Fiction. Gurganus next turned his historic sense on a public health catastrophe he had just improbably survived. 1996’s novel *Plays Well with Others* recounts the rise and fall of a band of young New York artists. The early days of their brilliant careers turn out to be the earliest days of AIDS in Manhattan.

This work was followed by 2001's *The Practical Heart: Four Novellas*, a return to the shorter form in units showing the greatest possible variety of voices and periods. The critical reception was laudatory. Five days after its publication, the World Trade Center fell.

From a boyhood spent among the burned ruins of Sherman's March, the obsession with history came naturally. History is a foregone conclusion in the fiction. Neighborhood history, village and family history, blend with national cataclysms. The author has said in a recent Iowa Writers' Workshop interview (available at the readers' site allangurganus.com), "Writing fiction means being enlisted by history while self-defensively dreaming right back into it. Novelists use literal events on the page. A pinch of borrowed reality can strength both the tale and teller. 'If this is true, then that might be so, and if that proves possible, why not even this?' We must trust our daily knowledge of what's unusual, meaning—if we are to properly simulate genius history itself—what is utterly improbable."

Finally "History," in Gurganus' fictional cosmos, always includes this crucial interest: Who gets to tell the history? Which winner is allowed to mint it as coin of the realm?

Throughout his fiction we find multiple, debated versions of a single tale. The last teller usually wins. (Recent science informs us that our last memory of a given childhood event does not equate with access to the original stimulation; we are simply remembering the last time that particular memory was summoned.) And so does narrative work in Gurganus' Falls. The most recent and vigorously told version usually outs. The process of history is seen as a continuous telling, a spiritual rite of renewal. "Stories only happen to people who can tell them. She who laughs, lasts." And she who tells the best local story in a universal way most indelibly, she wins the Homeric position of veneration, power.

"I contain multitudes," Walt Whitman reassures those eloquent congresses assembled within each of us. And in Falls, North Carolina, at least, citizens are all consulted, one by one, an aria at a time.

"APPOMATTOX, BABY"

From Oldest Living Confederate Widow Tells All. New York: Knopf, 1989.

Died on me finally. He had to.

Died doing his bad bugle imitations, calling for the maps, died bellowing orders at everybody horses included. "Not over there, dunderdick, rations go here." Stayed bossy to the last. He would look down in bed, he'd command the sheets to roll back. They didn't.

—My poor husband, Captain Marsden, he perished one Election Day. Children were setting off firecrackers on our vacant lot. Cap believed it was Antietam flaring up on him again like a game knee. So he went happy, yelling March! To his men (all dead) and to me (not dead yet, thank you very much). It's about what I expected I reckon.

He'd been famous for years around here. The longer he lived the more he got on the local news, then the national noticed, black and white and in color. They brought cameras South and all these lights walked right into our home and his bedroom. Folks put TV makeup on him. He thought it was poison ivy medicine. He hit the girl doing it.

I had to prime the Captain, make him tell his usuals. By then it was like getting your parrot going for company, you would say a key word and he'd chew it over, then you'd see it snag way in, and out whole favorites would crank—battle by battle—like rolls on some old player piano.

Strangers kept filing through our house, kept not wiping their feet, come to see the final vet of the War Betwixt States propped up. All them boys in blue were cold in Yankee earth. Captain had tricked the winning side by holding on to the last, too proud to quit, maybe too cranky. Oh he was a sight—gray uniform bunched over his pajamas, beard wild as a hedge and white to match his cataracts grown big as ice cubes. Above the bed he'd hung a tintype of his missing buddy, he kept a rusty musket within easy reach. From a nail, one child-sized bugle dangled on its blood-red cord. Plus he'd had a dried twig off this tree where something bad happened.

. . . His final thirty years I served as tour guide, and what I gave tours of was Captain Marsden. Kept hiding the bedpan, kept carding knots out of that beard, forever wrestling him into uniform and with Cap siccing the sentinels on me yet again.

. . . I begged reporters to please not use flashbulbs on him. Bright pops put him in an artillery frame of mind, shocked him into yelling for the horse brigade. But no sooner my back was turned, I'd see white light ricochet down the hall. I'd hear folks scatter.

Off he'd go again. Northern camera crews had flashed him back to combat moods and then they left. I had to slip in and calm him as best I could. I sat, stroking his white hair, smoothing his white beard. I sat cooing the only word that ever helped: "Appomattox, Appomattox, Appomattox, baby." —It's an Indian word, you know. That's why it's so pretty.

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ROBERT MORGAN b. 1944

Robert Morgan was born October 3, 1944, in Hendersonville, North Carolina, and grew up on the family farm in the Green River valley of the Blue Ridge Mountains. In his first three years he lived in a house near the river built by his great-grandfather Pace just after the Civil War. It was a house without plumbing, and the family kept their milk and butter in the nearby springhouse. With no car or truck or tractor, much of the work on the farm was done with a black horse called Old Nell.

Morgan has said that his earliest memory is waking up on his father's shoulder as the family returned home from prayer meeting. It had been hot in the church and he had fallen asleep. The motion of the walking made the stars above swim and dance, and the pasture grass sparkled with dew in the starlight. His mother and sister walked beside them, and the world of the night, with mountains looming on all sides like vast shadows, seemed at once mysterious and familiar.

When not working on the farm, tying pole bean strings, hoeing corn, leading the cow to the pasture and back, he was free to explore the yard and fields, the pasture, the gullies and the woods. He climbed most of the trees on the mountainside, and with a cousin dammed ponds on the pasture branch. He caught June Bugs and tied threads to their legs and flew them like model airplanes. He smoothed a board and used it as a sled to slide on the leaves down the side of Meetinghouse Mountain.

Hoeing corn and walking in the fields along Green River he found arrowheads and pieces of Indian pottery. It seemed to him the ground was haunted by the Cherokees and other Indians who had lived there for hundreds and thousands of years. Indians seemed to shout from the distant waterfall in wet weather. His dad told him stories about the Indians and Daniel Boone, and the last battle between the whites and Indians near the head of the river at the Abe Jones Flats.

Morgan wrote his first story in the sixth grade, in Mr. Ward's class. It was the year the Henderson County Public Library began sending a book mobile to Green River Baptist Church every first Monday afternoon of each month. From the book mobile, an old utility truck outfitted with book shelves, he took *Farmer Boy* and *Little House On the Prairie*. Then he discovered Jack London and James Oliver Curwood's stories of the Yukon, the Mounties, and Northwest Territories. He liked to read those adventure stories so much he brought them to school and, placing a novel inside a spelling book, continued to read in class.

Once Mr. Ward caught him reading while he was lecturing and instead of scolding the fiction-intoxicated miscreant, he simply lifted the book out of Robert's hands and laid it on the shelf without pausing in his lecture. In the spring of 1957 the class took a day trip to the Biltmore House, George Vanderbilt's improbable chateau near Asheville. The trip cost three dollars, which Robert didn't have. He stayed in the classroom, and when Mr. Ward saw him sitting there after the other students had left he said, "I don't want you to waste the day. Why don't you write a story, like those you enjoy reading."

Mr. Ward gave him a plot: a man is lost in the Canadian Rockies, without a gun or knife. How does he find his way back to civilization? Robert stared for a long time at the blank sheet of paper in front of him. Much as he loved to read stories, he did not know how to write one. Finally he decided he would just make up some details about how the man survived. He described how his character sharpened a stick on a rock to make a spear, how he rubbed sticks together to start a fire, and how he used a thorn as a kind of fish hook. He became so involved in making up details about the man's survival he forgot the time and was surprised when the other students returned from their outing. And he had written his first story.

Morgan had grown up in a family and community of story tellers. His grandpa loved to tell yarns about ghosts, mad dogs, panthers, bears, snakes. Though without much formal education, Robert's father, Clyde R. Morgan, loved to read history and study geography. He subscribed to *National Geographic* and loved to tell stories about the Civil War, the Revolution, about Daniel Boone and the Indians, family stories, Bible stories. His father could make history live through narratives and vivid detail. Robert could not remember a time when he did not know that Stonewall Jackson, just before he died, said, "Let us cross over the river and rest in the shade of the trees."

Morgan's mother was also a storyteller, with many anecdotes about witchcraft, babies "marked" in the womb, snakes that charmed both animals and people, victims of demon possession, and people who had committed "the unpardonable sin."

In those days the young were urged to study science "to beat the Russians" who had sent up the first Sputnik in 1957. He applied to NC State University to study aerospace engineering and applied mathematics.

While studying physics and differential equations, Morgan decided to accelerate and take a more advanced class in partial differential equations in the spring of 1963. But his advisor refused permission to accelerate since he had not made up a deficiency in solid geometry. In the gap left in his schedule Morgan signed up for English 222, Creative Writing, with the novelist Guy Owen. When he submitted to the class a story about his great-grandmother Delia Capps, who as a small child had been in Walterboro, South Carolina, when Sherman's army came through, Owen

brought the story into class and said, "I wept when I read this story." Thrilled that an author who had sold his novels to New York and Hollywood could be moved by something he had written, Morgan began to think more and more about the art of words, and less about differential equations.

For the next academic year Morgan transferred to UNC-Chapel Hill. At Chapel Hill Morgan was lucky to have Joseph Flora as his first teacher of English. It was Flora who introduced him to the literature of the West and the frontier. He was especially fortunate to have Jessie Rehder as his writing teacher at UNC-Chapel Hill. Morgan joined the staff of *The Carolina Quarterly* and met students from the Northeast who were passionately interested in poetry. Morgan was himself becoming more and more attentive to poetry. Having memorized poems in grammar school and high school by Poe, Lanier, Wordsworth, and Bryant, Morgan's true introduction to reading poetry had come when his sister returned from her first year at Bob Jones University with her English textbook, an anthology of American literature. Browsing through the book he found Walt Whitman, and was astonished by the first lines of the poem, "I celebrate myself and sing myself." He had never heard a voice with such intimacy, force and immediacy. Continuing to explore the collection he came across Wallace Stevens's "Domination of Black" with its rhyming hemlocks and peacocks, and the turning of the fire that is compared to the turning of the leaves outside and the turning of the stars far overhead. Hearing about Carl Sandburg, a neighbor in Flat Rock, had also sparked an interest in poetry.

In 1965, Morgan married Nancy Bullock of Hendersonville.

After one postgraduate year studying literature at Chapel Hill, Morgan transferred to the MFA program at UNC-Greensboro, where he had the particular good fortune to study with Fred Chappell. Holding two part-time jobs there, he did most of his class work as tutorials, meeting with Fred Chappell at a café called The Pickwick to go over the poems he was writing. At Greensboro he wrote less fiction and more and more poems. His son Ben was born in the summer of 1967.

Another happy event in 1967 was the founding of the magazine *Lillabulero* by Russell Banks, William Matthews, and Newt Smith in Chapel Hill. In 1969 Lillabulero Press published his first book, *Zirconia Poems* in Ithaca, New York, where Matthews was now teaching at Cornell.

Receiving a National Endowment for the Arts fellowship in 1969, he returned to Henderson County for two intense years of writing, reading, house painting, farming. Living in an old farmhouse rented from a cousin, he studied the grasses, flowers, weeds, and trees of the region, and wrote hundreds of drafts of short poems, searching for authenticity in diction, in compression and cadence of speech. The poems he wrote in those years became his second book, *Red Owl*.

In the fall of 1970 he gave a poetry reading at Cornell University, and met Baxter Hathaway, A.R. Ammons, Walter Slatoff, and other writers who

taught there. The next spring he was invited to teach at Cornell for a year while Ammons was on sabbatical. The move from the isolation of the Blue Ridge Mountains to Cornell was so jarring that he wrote little that year. But W.W. Norton accepted *Red Owl* for publication in 1972. Invited to stay on at Cornell, he did begin writing again, but the new poems were in a more fluent, more conversational voice, incorporating narrative, history, rhyme and traditional forms.

Living in Ithaca, sometimes homesick for the mountains of North Carolina, he began to study the history of the southern Appalachian region, the geography and geology, the flora and fauna, the settlement and speech, the Cherokee Indians and the Catawba Indians, the agriculture, the Revolution and Civil War. In Ithaca, which he called "Northern Appalachia," he became a student of his native region in a way he never had while living in North Carolina. And Cornell seemed an appropriate place to study and write poetry, with its agronomists and astronomers, ornithologists, architects and orchardists.

Morgan had never intended to stay in Ithaca, but the university promoted him so fast and so high that he remained there for forty years, becoming Kappa Alpha Professor of English in 1992.

Around 1980 Morgan decided to write prose fiction again. While continuing to write poems, he developed a new habit of getting up early every morning, before the children were awake, to work an hour or two on narrative. His daughter Laurel was born in 1974 and Nancy Kathryn in 1978. As it turned out, it took him about six years to write a short story good enough to publish.

The magazine at Cornell called *Epoch* began to publish Morgan's stories, and in 1989 Peachtree Publishers of Atlanta brought out his first volume of short stories, *The Blue Valleys*.

In 1989 Morgan received a fellowship from the Guggenheim Foundation. In 1974, 1981, and 1987, he had received additional grants from the National Endowment for the Arts. He was also given a fellowship by the New York State Arts Council. In 1979 *Poetry* magazine had given him the Eunice Tietjens Prize. And in 1991 the Fellowship of Southern Writers awarded him the Hanes Poetry Prize. The same year the governor of North Carolina selected him for the North Carolina Award in Literature.

The most important breakthrough for fiction writing came in 1989, when Morgan hoped to write a novel based on the life and death of his Uncle Robert, who was killed in a B-17 crash in East Anglia in November of 1943. For research he interviewed pilots and navigators, bombardiers and tailgunners from WWII, searched for and found the site of the crash in Suffolk. But having acquired so much factual information, he was unable to begin the fictional narrative. In frustration he decided to let the soldier's fiancée tell part of the story.

It was intimidating to think of writing from the point of view of a woman, in the voice of a woman. What did he know about how she would

view her life and recall events? But determined to begin his story he decided to become like an actor who erases himself to get into the character he is playing. Giving all his imaginative energy to the character, he let her tell her own story. It was this stepping aside and letting his character speak for herself that was his breakthrough. By the time he had written 30 pages he knew it as the best thing he'd ever written. It was the most important insight he ever learned about fiction writing. Eudora Welty had said as much in *One Writer's Beginning*, but Morgan, always a slow learner, had to come to the recognition on his own. As he liked to say to young writers, if there was hope for him there was hope for everybody. The story of the soldier's fiancée became the title novella of the book *The Mountains Won't Remember Us*.

Writing in first person, letting his characters tell their own stories, he finished the three novellas of *The Hinterlands*, published by Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill in 1994. Morgan had met Shannon Ravenel when he was an undergraduate at UNC, and after she chose his story "Poinsett's Bridge" for *New Stories from the South* and expressed an interest in his longer fiction, he began reworking a draft of a longer novel loosely based on the lives of his paternal grandparents. The novel was originally written in 3rd person, but after he decided to recast the story in 1st person, letting Ginny Powell tell her own story, the novel virtually exploded into life. He could hardly wait to get up each morning to see what his narrator would tell him. Her story became *The Truest Pleasure*, published in 1995, and was chosen as a *New York Times* Notable Book for that year.

Desiring to write a companion novel based on the lives of his maternal grandparents, whom he had known when he was a little boy, he stalled out each time he began, as the voice of Ginny Powell from the previous book reappeared. In frustration he gave it up and wrote only poems and short stories for over a year. Then in the spring of 1998, while serving as visiting writer at Davidson College, he realized that though Julie in the projected novel was not as well educated as Ginny, or as confident of her voice, that lack of education and confidence could be incorporated into the voice. Once he began writing the novel that became *Gap Creek*, he completed the first draft in less than four months, before returning to Ithaca that summer. As it turned out, *Gap Creek* was his lucky book, garnering wonderful reviews, chosen by Oprah for her book club, remaining on the *New York Times* bestseller list for three months. The novel received the Southern Book Award for 2000 and the Appalachian Writers Association Award. *The Balm of Gilead Tree: New and Selected Stories*, published the same year, received rave reviews. The novel *This Rock* followed in 2001, and *Brave Enemies: A Novel of the American Revolution* in 2003.

In the meantime Morgan had published *Topsoil Road: New Poems in 2000*, and *The Strange Attractor: New and Selected Poems* would follow in 2004. He served as visiting writer at Furman University in 2002 and 2004, and as Blackburn Visiting Writer at Duke in 2003. It was while he was at

Duke that he proposed to Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill that he write a nonfiction book, a biography of Daniel Boone. The research on the American Revolution for the novel *Brave Enemies* had renewed his interest in the frontier and American history. From boyhood he had been fascinated by the Indians, by the meeting of the Indians with the whites. His father had told stories about Daniel Boone and suggested that Boone, whose mother was Sarah Morgan, was a distant relative. Morgan had always loved to read biographies, and suspected that biography might be the most important genre in contemporary literature, as well as one of the most popular.

Plunging into research on Boone and the frontier, he visited all the places Boone was known to have lived. Delving into the archives of the vast Draper Collection at the Wisconsin Historical Society at Madison, he pored over documents and account books in Boone's own handwriting. Historians in Kentucky guided him to little known sites and shared survey maps and tax records from the eighteenth century. *Boone: A Biography* was published in 2007.

In 2009 a chapbook of new poems called *October Crossing* was published by Broadstone Books of Frankfort, Kentucky. In the fall of 2011 a full-length book of poems will be published by Penguin. Morgan is also at work on a long study of the Westward Expansion, a kind of sequel to *Boone*, tentatively titled *Lions of the West: Heroes and Villains of the Westward Expansion*. A series of linked biographies, covering the period from Thomas Jefferson to the Mexican-American War, the book explores the Mexican version of events as well as the American point of view.

Though increasingly interested in history and history writing, Morgan has continued to write poems and prose fiction. In 2005 he was inducted into the Fellowship of Southern Writers. In 2007 he received the Academy Award in Literature from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. He has also received the Appalachian Heritage Award from Shepherd University, the R. Hunt Parker Award from the North Carolina Humanities and Historical Society, the SELA Award from the Southern Library Association. In 2008 *Boone* was a finalist for the *Los Angeles Times* Book Award, and received the Kentucky Book Award. UNC-Chapel Hill awarded him an honorary Doctor of Letters degree in 2006, and the Thomas Wolfe Award in 2008. In 2005 he held the Whichard Chair at East Carolina University, and in 2007 the Rivers-Coffey Chair at Appalachian State University.

In Spring 2010 *Southern Quarterly* published a special issue edited by Jessie Graves devoted to essays on Morgan's writing. Robert West is also editing a volume of essays on Morgan's poetry and fiction for MacFarland Publishers.

In reviewing *Gap Creek* for the *New York Times*, Dwight Garner wrote, "At their finest, his stripped-down and almost primitive sentences burn with the raw, lonesome pathos of Hank Williams' best songs."

Of Morgan's poetry John Lang has written, "Morgan combines careful scientific observation with the insight of a visionary like Blake. Morgan's poems often create a Brownian motion of their own, as they become annunciations of a power in nature that radiates supernatural light...

"To read Morgan is to stand again at the edge of the orchard country, to gaze upon and move toward what he calls in the final line of 'Land Bridge', with its superb concluding pun, 'the tip of some unfolding/ giant land of our new being,/ the bridge to the original/ now buried beyond the littoral.'"

"THE DAY I FELL IN LOVE WITH THE SHOALS"

from The Truest Pleasure. Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 1995.

By myself I liked to walk along the still pools of the river beyond our fields, and into the woods up toward Cabin Creek. It soothed me to mosey on the banks where the water was slow and green. In fall leaves dropped in the river and appeared to float above the water they was so dry. In places the bank was scratched by muskrat slides. The woods by the river looked dark as a cellar.

Pa said the Indians named Green River in their own tongue, and white people took the name from them. We lived so close to the head the river wasn't wider than a creek. It started as a spring eight miles to the west and swung through a long valley. At the shoals it poured through a slot between mountains.

Pa said the river run on almost a hundred miles to the east. He said it run fast through Green River Cove as it dropped out of the mountains into flat country. He said his great-great-grandpa that fought at Cowpens and Kings Mountain lived on Green River down there where it run into Broad River. When that end of the river was settled there was still Indians in the mountains.

Sometimes I would set by the river and watch the water. The pools had a shiny green skin. Around sticks there was lips of ripples. Rings and curls passed over deep pools. In clear shallows minnows sprinkled this way and that way.

I watched eddies where the river turned back on itself. Along the bank, water with lather and sticks on it was moving back upstream, going fast in places, then getting slow and coiling, and caught by the main current again. In places water got trapped in a pocket and turned and turned for hours.

When I walked the river trail I could feel the ground shook by current. Above the shoals the bank trembled with the roar, like there was a furnace under it. The trail turned through laurels and climbed to a little bluff, and when you come down to the rocks there was the water foaming and flashing. The sight made me shudder.

The mountains rose straight up on either side of the shoals. From below, the slopes looked black. There was pines and hemlocks that stood by the water and pointed into the sky. And pines rose up the sides of the mountains, among the rock cliffs. The tops of the ridges was ragged and pointed with pine trees.

In summer there would be a long snake sunning itself on the rocks. It was almost the color of water, and when you got close the moccasin poured itself into a crevice.

The day I fell in love with the shoals I was standing with my feet in the water, below a big rock. It was like the water was talking, quoting scripture or muttering a poem. The river pulled at my feet heavy and powerful. The surface appeared to sort and resort a puzzle, scattering pieces and gathering them again.

But I was looking at the tall hemlocks pointing straight up the side of the mountain. I looked through the tops of the lower trees toward the pines further up, right to those on top of the ridge. And then I saw a cloud moving. It was just a little cloud in the clear sky, but white as snow. And it was like I was standing and looking right up the ladder of trees into heaven.

That was when I thought of the words from the Bible about the Ascension. "While they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold two men stood by them in white apparel, which said, Ye men of Galilee why stand ye gazing up into heaven?"

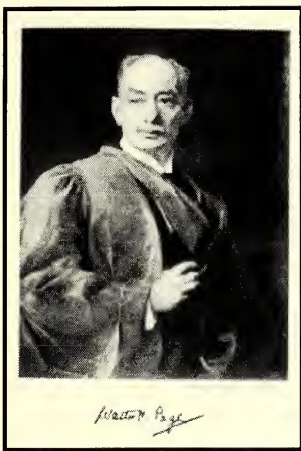
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WALTER HINES PAGE 1855 - 1918

Like the college-educated *lad* he describes in his “Study of an Old Southern Borough,” Walter Hines Page looked around his native North Carolina in the post Civil War years and saw a troubled future. And, facing the same dilemma as the *lad*, he chose to leave the Old North State. As journalist, publisher, social reformer and statesmen, Page made his home in Boston, New York and London.

But his writing and advocacy for such causes as industrial education and rural advancement in the South suggest that Page’s roots laid firmly planted in the land of the long leaf pine.

Wat, as Page was known to his family, was four months shy of his sixth birthday when North Carolina seceded from the United States on May 20, 1861. His family, particularly his father, did not immediately embrace the rebel cause. Page’s father, Frank, was a practical businessman, having made a small fortune from a timber and lumber operation based in the Piedmont near what is present-day Cary. He concluded that the South did not have the economic resources to sustain, and ultimately win, a war. Additionally, Frank Page was not a large slaveholder and saw no need for a battle to uphold the institution of slavery. At news of secession, Frank Page reportedly called the move “the most foolhardy enterprise that man ever undertook.”

But despite his objections to the war, Frank Page was not averse to doing business with the Confederacy. He saw a steady source of income in the nascent government’s need for lumber. That relationship with the Confederacy did not extend, however, to standing for the cause on the battlefield.

Frank Page’s conflicted relationship with the Confederacy and the greater Southern *cause* left a lasting impact on his son. At age 13 Walter was sent to Bingham School, a boy’s boarding school near Hillsborough. His classmates were the sons of former Confederate officers and statesmen. Recalling those years in an 1891 speech, Page said, “How greatly I suffered in my own childhood at our foremost school....The boys rated one another according to the military prominence of their fathers, and my father was so unthoughtful as not to be even a colonel.” The memory had not faded when Page penned his largely autobiographical novel *The Southerner* in the early 1900s. Nicholas Worth, the protagonist and a student at Colonel Graham’s boarding school, engages in fisticuffs several times to defend his father’s honor.

The youthful disputes described by Page smacked of the growing Southern belief in the "Lost Cause." Page biographer John Milton Cooper, Jr., suggests that his subject's time at Bingham marked his first exposure to the ideology, which boasted of the nobleness of the Southern fight and the chivalry of its warriors. A decade later, as a young writer seeking national exposure, Page would take on the Lost Cause, chiding Southerners for their allegiance to old traditions.

After undergraduate studies at Trinity College in Randolph County and Randolph-Macon College in Ashland, Virginia, the young scholar was invited in 1876 to join the first class of Fellows at the newly-formed Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. Page planned to earn a graduate degree in Greek and possibly devote himself to teaching. But Greek grammar could not compete with Page's increasing desire to add his name to the list of literary greats. Consequently the budding writer left Johns Hopkins in March 1878. Over the course of the ensuing two years, Page bounced between North Carolina and Kentucky seeking to make ends meet teaching and freelancing for a host of publications. During one prolonged period in North Carolina, Page worked on an essay about the social fabric of a Southern town. The article would eventually find its way into *The Atlantic Monthly* in May 1881 as "Study of an Old Southern Borough."

In January 1880 Page finally landed a full-time job in journalism working as a reporter for the *Gazette* newspaper in St. Joseph, Missouri. In later years, Page would boast of having covered the stockyards, but, in truth, most of his reporting appears to have been about politics and local cultural events. Page's drive and talent as a writer served him well in St. Joseph. By summer 1880 he had taken over editorship of the *Gazette*. He remained in that position until May 1881, when he took a leave of absence from the paper to travel the South.

Page's leave coincided with the publication of "Study of an Old Southern Borough" in *The Atlantic Monthly*, his first article for a national audience and his first enunciation of criticisms that he would level at the South throughout his life. Although he does not name the town in his essay, Page used Hillsborough as a model, describing a town with a "languid and self-satisfied appearance." Residents of the borough include the *ante-bellum gentleman*, who remains devoted to the ways of the pre-Civil War South, and the *merchant*, who sees "commercial possibilities" in the region if only "men of capital" could be persuaded to invest there.

Page's "Old Southern Borough" also includes the *lad*. In contrast to the *merchant* and *antebellum gentleman*, Page writes, the *lad* is not firmly set in his convictions and beliefs. When his education is "finished," often marked by graduation from college, the boy frequently enters "one of the professions or business, and he follows in the very footsteps of his father — in life and in thought." But sometimes the lad diverges from this path.

....[He] discovers for himself the mental stagnation of his surroundings, sees the stupid way that is open for him at home, and rebels against it. The only successful rebellion, however, is an immediate departure....Thus it has happened that the over-conservative spirit of these old towns has driven many of the best men away.

Page closes his essay by laying out a direction for his native region.

The new South cannot build up its possible civilization by looking backward and sighing, nor yet by simply pressing blindly forward in new paths that are now open. With a reverential respect for the past, which unhappily certain communities are too rapidly losing, and by a vigorous work for the futures, which many more communities neglect, it has through poverty a chance for greatness that is almost unparalleled in history.

As *The Atlantic Monthly*'s largely Northeastern readership contemplated the portrait of the South painted by one of its native sons, Page himself sought to better understand the region about which he had just written. Although well familiar with Virginia, North Carolina, and Kentucky, Page hardly knew other Southern states. His travels in summer 1881 took him through Georgia, Tennessee, Mississippi, and Alabama. From the road Page wrote letters to such major Northeastern newspapers as the *Boston Post* and the *New York World* detailing his encounters with Southerners he met along the way, including such notables as Jefferson Davis and Joel Chandler Harris. The papers printed his dispatches and asked for more.

Having tasted a modicum of success at reaching a national audience, Page resigned from the *Gazette* in November 1881. The following month he started work at the *New York World*, one of the papers for which he had filed his Southern dispatches. During his first year at the paper Page wrote the occasional editorial and covered politics outside of New York. While covering the federal Tariff Commission in Atlanta, Page met a young attorney who, like himself, was both Southern and an intellectual. The journalist's friendship with Woodrow Wilson would remain strong as the two rose to national prominence and would eventually result in Page's appointment by Wilson to an ambassadorship.

But in the early 1880s Page's mind was still very much set on a career in journalism. As he entered his second year at the *New York World*, Page shifted from reporting to literary criticism and editorial writing. But his new duties were short-lived. In spring 1883 newspaper publisher Joseph Pulitzer bought the *World*. Disdainful of the gritty style of reporting the new publisher was known to support, Page resigned in May 1883. He would later write that the *World* of his time had a "finished dignity such as no

American daily can now lay claim to.” Its editorial staff, he added, “was made up of a better class of writers than any other daily this country has ever had. Its essays and special articles, its literary criticisms and editorials, were classics.”

Without a job to support his wife and two young sons, Page left New York and returned to North Carolina. But he did not remain idle for long. With money borrowed from his father and a few others, Page started the *State Chronicle* in Raleigh in September 1883. He modeled the weekly newspaper after the format of his previous employers — the *St. Joseph Gazette* and the *New York World*. Its pages included a mix of serious journalism with lighter reading. As a weekly, the *Chronicle* could not provide up-to-the minute coverage of the news. Instead, Page sought to focus more on analysis and opinion. The first issue of the *Chronicle* promised “plain speaking editorials about living subjects, advocating honest democratic politics, industrial education, material development, money making and hearty living.”

In addition to coverage of the legislature and state politics, the *Chronicle* regularly featured articles about North Carolina businesses and factories. The paper’s editorial page frequently included calls for an industrial exposition in Raleigh. Page also sought to stir up readers with humorous articles about such topics as the best way to cook a rabbit and the evils of the frying pan. He cited the use of the latter as the root of many of the South’s problems.

With hopes of building a statewide readership, Page worked tirelessly to turn out an issue of the *State Chronicle* each week. And he did so almost singlehandedly. With the exception of a few correspondents who filed occasional pieces from around the state, Page was the paper’s sole writer. The *Chronicle*’s only other regular employees were its three-person printing staff.

Despite the hard work of Page and his staff, the paper never attracted the large readership it needed to survive. And after a little more than a year, Page decided to sell the paper to one of its young correspondents. Jonathan Daniels, a 22-year-old Wilson native, took over the *Chronicle* in February 1885. In later years Daniels would rise to prominence as publisher of the *Raleigh News and Observer*.

Although the *State Chronicle* never proved the statewide mouthpiece that Page had envisioned, the newspaper did rack up a few notable achievements under its founding editor. The *Chronicle* was the first paper in the state to abandon the use of *we* in its editorials, instead referring to the publication in the third person. Page also demanded that the newspaper capitalize the word *Negro*, a practice rarely found beyond the pages of a select few Northeastern publications and one designed to note a generally friendly attitude toward Blacks in editorial stance. Finally, the *Chronicle* distinguished itself with its efforts to develop a readership across the state.

The strategy had been tried by only a few large metropolitan dailies. And there were few of those in the South.

Beyond the pages of the *Chronicle*, Page left his mark on North Carolina through his instrumental role in establishing the Watauga Club, a group of 24 young, professional, white men who met regularly in Raleigh to discuss ways to raise educational and economic standards in North Carolina. The organization was the primary force behind the push for a school in Raleigh offering instruction “in wood-work, mining, metallurgy, practical agriculture and in such other branches of industrial education as may be deemed expedient.” The club’s efforts would ultimately bear fruit in 1887 with the state legislature’s establishment of the North Carolina College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts, the predecessor of today’s North Carolina State University.

The creation of the new college, though, did not come without a fight. And Page jumped into the fray from New York City, where he had moved shortly after selling the *Chronicle* to Daniels. As he churned out freelance articles for a variety of Northeastern publications, Page continued to follow happenings in his home state. From summer 1885 until fall 1886, he wrote letters almost weekly for publication in the *State Chronicle*. Many featured criticism of North Carolina politicians and preachers and decried the ignorance and prejudice Page saw in the state.

Angered by opposition to the Watauga Club’s proposal for a state industrial school, Page penned a February 1, 1886, letter labeling critics of the idea *Mummies*. “The world must have some corner in it where men can sleep and dream and dream,” he writes, “And North Carolina is as good a spot for that as any.” Then, sounding a familiar refrain, Page points out that “the most active and useful and energetic men born in North Carolina” — great writers, statesmen or scientists — no longer call the state home. “Why?” he asks. “The Mummies! That’s why.” Page avoids naming the Mummies, but he doesn’t shy away from describing them:

Count on your fingers the five men who fill the highest places or have the greatest influence on education in North Carolina. Not one of them is a scholar! Count the five most influential editors in the State. Not one of them could earn in the great centers of journalism \$10 a week as a reporter....The misfortune is, nobody questions their right....Are we to sit down quietly forever and allow every enterprise that means growth, every idea that means intellectual freedom to perish, and the State to lag behind always, because a few Mummies will be offended? It would be cheaper to pension them all, than longer listen to them.

Page’s February 1 letter was merely the opening salvo in his attack on North Carolina’s leadership. In the ensuing weeks he wrote several others. And, not surprisingly, his epistles sparked reaction. The *State Chronicle*

happily printed Page's letters, but its editors disavowed his views. Consequently they were all too eager to print letters and columns criticizing the journalist. Several of the state's newspapers also attacked Page. The *Chatham Record* suggested that "if such men as [Senator Zebulon B.] Vance, [Senator Matt W.] Ransom, [Governor Albert M.] Scales and other leading men of North Carolina are 'mummies' and Mr. Page is a LIVE man, then please give us more 'Mummies.'"

But Page found a defender in a young Goldsboro lawyer. In a letter to the journalist, Charles B. Aycock, later to earn a reputation as North Carolina's "education governor", wrote that "fully three fourths of the people are with you," and "I wish heartily that you and Joe Daniels had a round ½ million and were running a daily in Raleigh, it would be worth more to North Carolina than all the living and dead 'Mummies' have been in a quarter of a century."

Page's "Mummy Letters" may have finally gotten the writer the statewide attention he sought while running the *State Chronicle*. But his epistles from New York provided no income. Consequently Page continued to look for a full-time job. He signed on with the New York *Evening Post* in winter 1887. But when the opportunity to join the staff of a two-year-old magazine came his way six months later, he gladly took it.

Page signed on as business manager with the *Forum*, a monthly publication of news and opinion. But four years later, in 1891, the magazine's owners realized that the Tar Heel was better suited for editorial work. They named him editor and gave him stock in the company.

Page represented a new type of magazine editor. His predecessors had filled their publications each month with submitted manuscripts and reprints of articles clipped from foreign publications. But Page looked to current political, literary, social and scientific discussions to shape the monthly content of the *Forum*. He wrote detailed letters to authors describing the articles he wished them to produce. Stories often touched on education, urban problems, and business. Articles on the South also often found their way into the *Forum*. The rise of lynching in the 1890s, for instance, prompted several stories.

When relations between Page and the *Forum* owners soured in summer 1895, the Tar Heel moved to Boston to join the staff of *The Atlantic Monthly*. Within three years he had become editor of the magazine, one of the most respected in the country. As such, Page was in demand as a public speaker. Not surprisingly he used his addresses to champion some of the same causes that he advocated in print.

Improvement in public education proved the central theme of "The Forgotten Man," a speech delivered at the State Normal and Industrial College in Greensboro (today's UNC-Greensboro) in 1897 and often considered Page's most famous address. Page spoke of North Carolina's "forgotten and neglected" men and women, the "common people" who make up the "foundation" of society. He praised them as North Carolina's

greatest “undeveloped resource” and decried their illiteracy. Page recalled the state’s earlier systems of education, which catered mostly to the ruling class or those well-connected to the church. And then he talked of the promise represented by the movement for tax-supported, public schools. “A public school system generously supported by public sentiment, and generously maintained by both State and local taxation,” he said, “is the only effective means to develop the forgotten man, and even more surely the only means to develop the forgotten woman.” Page closed his speech with great optimism. “Great changes come as silently as the seasons,” he opined. “I am no more sure of this spring time than I am of the rejuvenation of our society and the lifting up of our life....The neglected people will rise and with them will rise all the people.”

Page’s outspokenness on educational issues eventually landed him on the Southern Education Board. The organization’s members, all white, included Southern educational leaders, Southern expatriates and Northern philanthropists. The group focused on improving education for rural Southerners and for African-Americans. In the early 20th century the board and its offshoots financed public school campaigns in several former Confederate states. For his part, Page proved less a financial backer of the board than a spokesman for it, traveling the country giving speeches and publishing articles about education reform.

In the winter of 1899 Page’s speechmaking took him on a six-week trip through the South and, as he had done in 1881, he used the tour to record observations of his native region. He planned to write an article for the *Atlantic* upon his return to Boston. But before completing the article, Page resigned as editor of *The Atlantic* and returned New York to work with publishing magnate Samuel S. McClure.

Several factors motivated Page’s departure from Boston in summer 1899. The editor was eager to add publisher to his title and he was tired from overwork and a string of illnesses. More importantly, perhaps, McClure offered Page an enticing financial package — a salary of \$15,000 a year, \$50,000 in stock and generous royalties on a set of encyclopedias he hoped his new employee would edit.

But Page’s high hopes gave way to reality in fall 1899. McClure failed to own up to his promise of a magazine editorship for Page. And the editor’s dream of a significant role in a publishing empire was shattered when McClure’s attempted takeover of Harper & Brothers, the nation’s largest publishing house, fell through.

Page didn’t wait long to jump ship. In December 1899, he and Frank S. Doubleday, a publisher and one-time partner of McClure, launched Doubleday, Page and Company. The new venture was to include both book *and* magazine publishing. But the two partners agreed that they would focus first on expanding their stable of authors. Doubleday signed up Rudyard Kipling and Booth Tarkington while Page lured Mary Wilkins and fellow Southerner Ellen Glasgow from other publishing houses. The Tar

Heel publisher also contracted with another Southerner for a book that had yet to be written. Booker T. Washington's *Up From Slavery* proved a best-seller for the publishing house in its second year of operation. By then the company had already seen top sellers from Glasgow, Tarkington, and several others.

In time Page signed up several other Southern writers, including Joel Chandler Harris and James Branch Cabell. Page also published a series of racist historical novels from fellow Watauga Club member Thomas Dixon. In such works as *The Leopard's Spots* and *The Clansman*, Dixon preached a strong message of African-American racial inferiority. Although Dixon's novels sold well, Page would later express some regret for having published them.

As planned, after about a year of focusing exclusively on book publishing, Page turned his attention toward starting Doubleday, Page & Company's first magazine. With the Tar Heel as editor, the premier issue of *World's Work* rolled off the presses in November 1900. Its publication, Cooper suggests, heralded the birth of the 20th century newsmagazine. Rather than illustrations, which had provided the pictorial accompaniment for text in centuries past, *World's Work* included photographs. The magazine also leaned heavily toward coverage of current issues in politics, science and the arts — hardly a surprise with Page at the top of the masthead. *World's Work* did not include fiction, a departure from the formula for general interest magazines in the past. But it did include commentary. The first 20 or 30 pages of each issue were devoted to "The March of Events," a section in which Page offered his opinions on the issues of the day.

Despite editing a monthly magazine and running a publishing house, Page still found time to work on longer-term writing projects. The observations he recorded during his Southern speechmaking tour in 1899 eventually made their way into print as "The Rebuilding of Old Commonwealths." The essay appeared in both magazine and book form in May 1902. Page's former employer, *The Atlantic Monthly*, finally got its long-promised article. And his current employer, Doubleday, Page & Company, finally had the chance to publish a book by its highly acclaimed editor and publisher. The book, titled *The Rebuilding of Old Commonwealths: Being Essays Toward's the Training of the Forgotten Man in the Southern States*, also included "The Forgotten Man" and another highly regarded Page speech.

In "The Rebuilding of Old Commonwealths," Page renewed some of the arguments he had made in "Study of an Old Southern Borough." He even began the article by revisiting the unnamed town he described in his first piece for the *Atlantic* 21 years earlier. But Page's 1902 essay was not as pessimistic as the one he had published in 1881. He noted signs of progress in the South. And he credited education, particularly industrial education,

for the advancement. "Training to economic independence is the only true emancipation," he wrote.

Although the message of *The Rebuilding of Old Commonwealths* is now long outdated, the volume remains notable today as the only book Page ever published under his own name. *A Publisher's Confession*, a compilation of letters that Page wrote about his trade to a Boston newspaper, was published anonymously in 1905. And *The Southerner*, Page's only novel, appeared on Doubleday, Page's fall list for 1909 as an autobiography penned by Nicholas Worth. Despite the pseudonym, many at the time knew that Page was the author and his veiled portrayals of family members and Southern politicians did not earn him points with either group.

The Southerner did not generate large sales for Doubleday, Page. Nor did the novel receive high praise from critics. One of the most critical reviews appeared in the Raleigh *News and Observer*. University of North Carolina history professor J.G. de Roulhac Hamilton suggested that *The Southerner* was a "fairly tale" with a "holier than thou" attitude. He wrote that the novel "drags along, interrupted at intervals by soliloquizing and much philosophizing, most of it based on false premises."

As he continued to write, edit and publish, Page also took on a greater role in public affairs. The Tar Heel remained a strong voice for educational improvement in the South, primarily through his work with the Southern Education Board and its offshoot the General Education Board. But he also began devoting time to a second cause, rural advancement. In 1908 President Theodore Roosevelt appointed Page to the Commission on Country Life, a group seeking to understand factors slowing growth in the countryside and to suggest ways to better the lives of farmers. Commission members traveled the country with experts to study the issues. During one such trip through North Carolina, Page became aware of the effects hookworms were having on his fellow Tar Heels. The incident sparked the editor to add the eradication of the parasitic disease to his growing portfolio of causes. With Page's persuasion, the Rockefeller Commission for the Extermination of the Hookworm Disease began work in 1909. Page served as a director in the organization and helped manage an endowment of one million dollars.

Page's life in public affairs likely reached its pinnacle in 1913 when his friend Woodrow Wilson, as President, named him Ambassador to Great Britain. The Tar Heel used his post to promote strengthened relations between Britain and the U.S., much as he had done for sectional reconciliation in the U.S. decades earlier. At the outbreak of World War I in 1914, Page pushed for U.S. neutrality. But gradually the ambassador moved toward advocating American involvement with the Allied cause. His stance led the Wilson administration to sideline him in important negotiations. When the U.S. did eventually enter the war in 1917, Page worked tirelessly to keep relations smooth between the Allies. But his efforts

were short-lived. Hypertension took a toll on the ambassador's health and in fall 1918 he returned to the U.S., barely surviving the ship journey home. Page died in Pinehurst on Dec. 21, 1918. He was survived by his wife, Alice, three sons and a daughter.

During his 63-year life Walter Hines Page distinguished himself as a writer, editor, publisher, social reformer and diplomat. His efforts to improve Anglo-American relations are remembered today with a plaque at London's Westminster Abbey describing him as "The Friend of Britain in Her Sorest Need." His advocacy on behalf of public education is noted with Walter Hines Page High School in Greensboro, the city where he made his most famous call for tax-supported schools. Today the North Carolina Literary Hall of Fame honors Walter Hines Page for his contributions to the written word and, just as importantly, for his devotion to his native state. The *lad* may have left home to find fame (and some fortune). But for Walter Hines Page, North Carolina and the South was always where his heart lay.

"THE LIFE AND LETTERS OF WALTER H. PAGE"

Doubleday, Page & Company, 1922

Chapter I: A Reconstruction Boyhood

The earliest recollections of any man have great biographical interest, and this is especially the case with Walter Page, for not the least dramatic aspect of his life was that it spanned the two greatest wars in history. His last weeks in England (as Ambassador) Page spent at Sandwich, on the coast of Kent; every day and every night he could hear the pounding of the great guns in France, as the Germans were making their last desperate attempt to reach Paris or the Channel ports. His memories of his childhood days in America were similarly the sights and sounds of war. Page was a North Carolina boy; he has himself recorded the impression that the Civil War left upon his mind.

-Burton J. Hendrick

"One day," *he writes*, "when the cotton fields were white and the elm leaves were falling, in the soft autumn of the Southern climate wherein the sky is fathomlessly clear, the locomotive's whistle blew a much longer time than usual as the train approached Millworth. It did not stop at so small a station except when there was somebody to get off or to get on, and so long a blast meant that someone was coming. Sam and I ran down the avenue of elms to see who it was. Sam was my Negro companion, philosopher, and friend. I was ten years old and Sam said that he was

fourteen. There was constant talk about the war. Many men of the neighborhood had gone away somewhere – that was certain; but Sam and I had a theory that the war was only a story. We had been fooled about old granny Thomas’s bringing the baby and long ago we have been fooled also about Santa Claus. The war might be another such invention, and we sometimes suspected that it was. But we found out the truth that day, and for this reason it is among my clearest early recollections.

“For, when the train stopped, they put off a big box and gently laid it in the shade of the fence. The only man at the station was the man who had come to change the mail bags; and he said that this was Billy Morris’s coffin and that he had been killed in a battle. He asked us to stay with it till he could send word to Mr. Morris, who lived two miles away. The man came back presently and learned against the fence till old Mr. Morris arrived, an hour or more later. The lint of cotton was on his wagon, for he was hauling this crop to the gin when the sad news reached him; and he came in his shirt sleeves, his wife on the wagon seat with him.

“All the neighborhood gathered at the church, a funeral was preached and there was along prayer for our success against the invaders, and Billy Morris was buried. I remember that I wept the more because it now seemed to me that my doubt about the war had somehow done Billy Morris an injustice. Old Mrs. Gregory wept more loudly than anybody else; and she kept saying, while the service was going on, ‘It’ll be my John next.’ In a little while, sure enough, John Gregory’s coffin was put off the train, as Billy Morris’s had been, and I regarded her as a woman gifted with prophecy. Other coffins, too, were put off the from time to time. About the war there could no longer be a doubt. And, a little later, its realities and horrors came nearer home to us with swift, deep experiences.

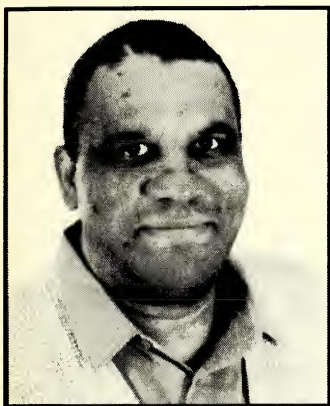
“One day my father took me to the camp and parade ground ten miles away, near the capital. The General and the Governor sat on horses and the soldiers marched by them and the band played. They were going to the front. There surely must be a war at the front, I told Sam that night. Still more coffins were brought home, too, as the months and the years passed; and the women of the neighborhood used to come and spend whole days with my mother, sewing for the soldiers. So precious became woolen cloth that every rag was saved and the threads were unraveled to be spun and woven into new fabrics. And they baked bread and roasted chickens and sheep and pigs and made cakes, all to go to the soldiers at the front.”

From: The Southerner, Chapter I. (The first chapter in this novel is practically autobiographical, though fictitious names have been used.)

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SAMM-ART WILLIAMS b. 1946

“Samm-Art Williams”

by Trudier Harris

from *Afro-American Writers After 1955: Dramatists and Prose Writers*. Eds. Thadious M. Davis and Trudier Harris, 1985.

In 1978, at the age of thirty-two, Samm-Art Williams completed *Home*, a drama which depicts the journey of a young black man from rural Cross Roads, North Carolina, to the North and back, and which espouses a love of the land, folksy philosophies, and a universal longing for *Home*. The play was produced in 1979, won several awards, and was generally greeted with enthusiasm by a wide-ranging audience. It ran for ten months on Broadway and catapulted Williams to a national reputation . . . Production of *Home* made Williams the hottest young black playwright in America. He was automatically made the official spokesman for young black playwrights, and, with public attention focused on him, he was expected to top or equal his success with *Home*. This public acclaim was the culmination of years of hard work.

Samuel Arthur Williams was born and raised in Burgaw, North Carolina, which serves as the model for Cross Roads in *Home*. This community of 1,700 is about thirty-five miles southwest of Jacksonville and twenty-five miles northwest of Wilmington. When Williams was growing up there, it resembled many small-town environments in the South which were made up primarily of families, extended families, and neighbors who were treated as a part of the family. Valdosia and Samuel Williams, Samm's parents, separated when the child was four, and he was nurtured and reared by his mother, grandfather, uncle, “and everybody else” because his mother's side of the family lived nearby. An uncle lived next door; the grandfather was three doors away; and an aunt lived next door to the grandfather. Lots of cousins were “around all the time.”

The rural community of Burgaw clearly defined a role for its young people. They were to go to school at home, away to college if they could, and make something of themselves. Samm managed the first two requirements by attending Burgaw Elementary School, C. F. Pope High School, and Morgan State College in Baltimore. Making something of himself was another story; his desire to be a playwright did not fall into the realm of tangible success with which his family and neighbors could conspicuously identify. His early recognition that his goals were different caused him to keep his writing desires a secret. A more acceptable path

would have been for him to play football or basketball; everybody wanted him to be an athlete. His 6'6" size demanded that, his neighbors maintained. Although Samm did not hate athletics, he did not like to compete. He did not find it "fun." An early attempt at basketball made him an embarrassing legend at his own school: he scored a basket for the opposing team.

. . . From as early as the ninth grade, though, Williams knew he wanted to be a writer. His mother apparently sensed the unusual talent in her son and encouraged it as best she could. Valdosa Williams was an English teacher at C. F. Pope High School and was also in charge of the drama department. . . . She had a combination of talents and competencies which her son undoubtedly found inspiring. He calls her his "first real influence in terms of drama." She guided his reading, of which drama was the largest part, from his budding ninth-grade interest throughout his high school years. She bought a Shakespeare library and recordings of the plays for Samm, so he could "listen to the albums and read the scripts." By the time he was in the twelfth grade, he was familiar with most of Shakespeare's plays. Mrs. Williams also guided her son's reading in works by the black writers he most appreciates today; Langston Hughes and James Weldon Johnson are two of his favorites. Most important, Mrs. Williams provided opportunities for her son to act in plays she directed, experience which would serve him in good stead later in Philadelphia and in New York.

Williams's Morgan State memories are dominated by a flood of athletics and a drought of exposure to the arts. In the mid-1960s, football, track, and other sports captured money and attention at Morgan State. There was no drama department, and only two creative writing courses, both of which Williams took, were offered in the English department. Williams majored in political science and minored in psychology, slight gestures perhaps to his grandfather's desire that he become a lawyer. Because civil-rights activities had opened doors to black students, the atmosphere was tense with the pressure to achieve; students were pushed to become doctors and lawyers. Writing was considered a frivolous activity.

Williams continued to write during his college years, but "couldn't find anybody to really take it seriously." He wrote poetry at this stage and recalls that acquaintances thought that was "the funniest thing in the world," because he had a reputation for being kind of "wild and woolly." The comic incongruity of an athletic-looking young man like Williams writing poetry was not lost on his fellow students. And the lack of drama and playwriting courses did not advance his plans to become a playwright.

Upon graduation from Morgan State, he moved to Philadelphia, where he would get his first exposure to organized theater groups and had his first opportunity to work with professionals in the theater. In Philadelphia in 1968, Williams joined the Freedom Theater, a neighborhood theater group headed by John Allen and Bob Lesley. These men had pooled resources to

give acting workshops and succeeded in getting drama instructors from Temple University to work with them. Williams participated in the workshop productions and “secretly” wrote poetry. The poetry writing experience would later be helpful in the composition of *Home* . . . and a 1977 musical, *The Last Caravan*, but the acting experience served as his immediate entry to New York. It was not until after his arrival in New York in 1973 that Williams found an environment which at least provided spiritual support for his desire to become a writer.

The move from Philadelphia to New York came about in part as the result of the end of Williams’s marriage. He packed his clothes in his van and drove to New York in what would be his home for the next three nights. He quickly met other struggling, budding writers and actors and moved from his van to a brownstone in Brooklyn, which he and five others rented for \$380 a month. He worked in gasoline stations and tended bar until he got a role in a commercial for Fortified Oat Flakes in November 1973. This little break set the pattern for the next few years. Williams says, “I actually came to New York with the intention of becoming a writer, but I knew that I would have to do some acting to pay the rent.” In December 1973 Williams played in Ken Eulo’s *Black Jesus*, his first part in a play in New York.

Still, things did not move quickly. He was rejected after his first audition to join the Negro Ensemble Company in February 1974, but the occasion was nevertheless an important one because he met Douglas Turner Ward. Later in 1974, Ward hired Williams to act in a production in the “Season Within A Season” sponsored by the playwright’s workshop. Williams had worked on two or three plays to this point, but nothing had taken definite form. He finally finished *Welcome to Black River* in 1974, and it was produced in the playwright’s workshop of the Negro Ensemble Company in 1975.

Welcome to Black River, one of Williams’s favorite plays, deals with the rural community he would return to four years later in *Home*. Between the two plays, Williams wrote eight others, several of which were produced by the Negro Ensemble Company or by Williams himself. The plays . . . vary in themes and quality, and they came rapidly after 1974. They are “Sometime From Now,” *A Love Play*, *The Coming* and *Do Unto Others*, “Break of Day Arising,” *Brass Birds Don’t Sing*, “The Pathetique” (written in 1977, produced as *The Sixteenth Round* in 1980), and *The Last Caravan*.

Of the plays, the most ambitious is *Brass Birds Don’t Sing*. It depicts sisters who were rescued from a Lebensborn breeding camp in Poland during World War II by an American soldier. Their adoption and immigration to the United States did not save them from persecution. . . . The play is about victims – victims of physical violence and victims of ideological violence. No one cares that Donia and Freida, now in their

thirties, were forced to breed for the Nazis; they are still tainted with the stench of prostitution. No one knows that the two women, Jews who were raised as Catholics and ironically selected for breeding purposes, were rejected even by the Germans when their girlish blond hair turned dark with age. The neighbors, true patriots all, know only that there is a sinister, alien, Nazi-connected pollution in their midst; it must be eradicated.

... *The Last Caravan* is a delightful musical that depicts the effects of aging on masculinity. Abraham, who discovers at sixty-five that he no longer has "lead in his pencil," seeks a remedy. He gets an elixir from a hoodoo woman, and it restores his vitality even though it is only composed of fruit juices. If one has hope to forestall Mother Nature, sings Abe, that is magic enough.

... *The Sixteenth Round* is a sentimental portrayal of an aging, battle-scarred boxer whose physical and mental deterioration make his dream of returning to the ring a pathetic wish. Jesse has imprisoned himself in the apartment of his girlfriend Marsh to wait for the executioner who will kill him for having thrown a fight. Lemar, the executioner, arrives and finds out that Jesse will soon be dead whether he kills him or not. The play is a series of conversations punctuated by the playing of Tchaikovsky's *Pathetique* and Jesse's cries in response to the pain in his head. The suspense of the buildup to the expected execution is lessened by the silly but brutal tricks Lemar plays on the couple. Williams chose the dissolution of dramatic effect instead of violence, commenting, "Now, I think that that play when it was produced would have been more successful had he just blown the guy's brains out. ... everybody's sitting there; it builds up to the fact that this man should kill this man and you expect it. Instead of him doing that, I take it the other way because I don't think that he should have. ... I just see redeeming qualities in people."

Seeing redeeming qualities in people is a part of Williams's philosophy. He chooses themes based on "human interests," on the premise that man is innately good but for the negative impact of his environment. That approach guides *Brass Birds Don't Sing* and the other plays. Issues, Williams believes, are not to be dealt with unless they emanate from human beings living through them or trying to come to grips with them. The individual should be on center stage, not the issue. His strong reaction to issues dominating human beings originates in part in his response to black playwrights of the 1960s who, he believes, distorted the reality of black existence in America. They painted the black middle class as universally snobbish and black militants as universally good. They alienated older blacks by making them feel like Uncle Toms, and Williams does not believe in Uncle Tom: "I don't think that Uncle Tom ever existed. I think that people did what they had to do to live, in order to get along. ... Stepin Fetchit and Willie Best had to buck their eyes. They had to do it to work. Now we can sit back and say, oh my God, those guys, I don't even want to

see them. What else were those people going to do? You know, that was the closest that they could come to expressing their craft as you can get. And I think they were brilliant actors because I don't think they could feel that way deep down in their hearts. In their heart of hearts, these people knew that this was disgusting to them, but what else could they do? What else could they take? . . . I don't believe in Uncle Tom. I think that alienated and made a lot of old people feel bad, a lot of our 60's writers, because they were so angry that they lost the objectivity in terms of what they were doing. There are a lot of people who fight very, very hard to become middle-class and millionaires. Now I'm not justifying what they do once they get there, but you must respect one thing, that if you are Black in this country, nothing is free. If you got it, you worked for it, and you deserve to have it." Williams feels the distortion will be historically detrimental to black people. Because black playwrights between 1959 and the early 1970s did not show both sides of the coin, that some militants were on drugs and irresponsible or that some middle-class blacks bailed demonstrators out of jail or that some white people did not deserve to be slaughtered, young black people growing up during that period could have incomplete images of black life in America.

Williams centers his plays, therefore, upon human beings: "I'm more interested in how the human being approaches the issue instead of trying to write about the issue itself . . ."

Focus on the individual human being is the essence of *Home*. The play deals with the Vietnam War, welfare, alcoholism, and drugs, but these issues are reflected only through the eyes of Cephus Miles, the lead character in the play. *Home* portrays Cephus's transition from teenage years to manhood. Southern-born and rural-bred, Cephus has few ideological opinions, but he knows he does not want to fight in Vietnam. After a five-year stint in jail for refusing to be inducted into the army, during which he loses the farm his grandfather has left to him, Cephus goes to "a very, very large American city," where he is fired from a job when his past is revealed. He quickly degenerates to welfare, drugs, and skid row. A letter from his aunt, with the news that his farm has been recovered, rescues him; he returns to Cross Roads, North Carolina, and the land, is reunited with his high-school sweetheart, and presumably lives happily ever after. He is secure in the knowledge that unfaltering love will be rewarded and that God has finally returned from vacationing in Miami.

Only two other actors appear in the play, both of whom are women. In masterful changes of roles, they play characters in Cephus's life ranging from mischievous neighborhood children to lovers to seductresses to policemen to doting, aged relatives. The play was presented by the Negro Ensemble Company, opening at St. Marks Playhouse on 19 December 1979. It was later transferred to the Cort Theatre with the original cast. L. Scott Caldwell and Michele Shay played the people in Cephus's life, and

Charles Brown played Cephus Miles. The production was a hit. Critics were universal in their praise for the show. Mel Gussow of the *New York Times* called *Home* "a freshet of good will, a celebration of the indomitability of man, a call to return to the earth. In all respects – writing, direction and performances – this is one of the happiest theatrical events of the season." Maintaining that the play was "seamlessly directed" and "acted with spontaneity and authority," Gussow concluded that it was "an uplifting folk ballad about the pure in heart." Douglas Watt in the *Daily News* called the play "sweet, simple, funny and endearing" and its folksy quality "both entertaining and inspiring." Leo Seligsohn of *Newsday* suggested the play was "a gentle embodiment of that sense of wonder, evoked with poetry and sunny folk legend." He saw Cephus's voyage from South to North as a "watercolor, bright with humor, and highlighted by great shafts of tall-story folk legend. The dialogue ranges from verse and soliloquies to short episodes that play almost like skits."

Several of the scenes in *Home* are Cephus's memories of his childhood years in Cross Roads. There are tales of catfish fries on the banks of the White Stocking River and of the children conceived at such late-night parties, tales of Cephus's work with his grandfather and Uncle Lewis in those days when things were all right with the world, and memories of his dog Brownie. There are also folk stories of characters like Hard-Headed Herbert, whose head could support the weight of a fourteen-wheel truck, and Ole Chief, "the colored Indian" who cons his neighbors out of money by pretending not to speak English. The dominant memories are of Pattie Mae Wells, Cephus's overly religious and proper childhood sweetheart who has left him to marry someone of higher social standing. The good times and the bright, romantic days are a contrast to the city and the lack of communal and spiritual support found there. Cephus gets a job and a beautiful woman, but he is deserted by the woman when he is fired from his job. Welfare will provide him with only the funds to live below a subsistence level, and he finds himself sweeping out barrooms for survival. He experiments with drugs, then becomes a wino, which ages him far beyond his years. Reclaiming himself from his dissolution is Cephus's major task in the play, and he accomplishes it with good humor and admirable faith.

Home presented the archetypal movement of young blacks from the rural South to a mythical North, where they believe the streets will be paved with gold. The movement is simultaneously romantic, painful, and enlightening. The timelessness of the theme and the pervasiveness of the myth contributed to the success of the show, for which Williams received several awards and recognitions. On 8 July 1980, he received the Governors' Award from North Carolina; he received the Outer Circle Award for 1979-1980 – The John Gassner Playwriting Award; he was

nominated for an Antoinette Perry (Tony) Award; and on 17 November 1980 he received the eighth annual Audelco Recognition Award.

Williams was somewhat surprised with the success of *Home* because, contrary to usual trends, “it dealt with Southern Black people not in a stereotypical role and it showed socially what happens to a man. Usually, when we see a play about someone who’s a drug addict, we only see the end result. We never show how the man got there, or the fact that he even makes an attempt to come back. So I was saying when I wrote that, now this is going to be too merry. But it happens every day. There are people on drugs, there are people who’ve hit the skids who are struggling to come back. A lot of those people don’t want to be there. They find themselves there for whatever reason and they can’t get back and that’s why, I guess that’s why it took me two years to get *Home* produced.” When the play was finished in 1978, Williams took it “to every theater in New York” between that time and the end of 1979. Finally, Douglas Turner Ward at the Negro Ensemble Company gave the play a staged reading. The audience liked it, and Ward produced the play. A few technical changes were made for staging purposes, but Williams’s original “vision of the production” was retained.

About fifty percent of the play is autobiographical, based on characters and places Williams knew in Burgaw; stories and poetry reminiscent of black folk tradition were invented. In fact, the entire play started out as a poem which was intended to reflect the reverse migration of black people from the North to the South. The idea had come to Williams one Christmas Eve as he rode the bus from New York to North Carolina (he is “deathly afraid” of flying). He observed people going home “pretending” they were happy living in the North (the usual fiction to present to relatives in the South); yet he knew “all of us were living just as hard up here as we could possibly live.” His knowledge of the reality of black life in both New York and the South helped Williams create the verisimilitude he credits with contributing to the popularity of the play: “Anybody that says you can never go home again didn’t come from the kind of place I came from; that’s the only place you can go when there’s nowhere else to go. And I think that’s one of the reasons it had such a good audience, such a huge audience is because of that particular theme . . . and also because of the recognition of characters. People don’t usually vary from one *Home* to another. Everybody’s got an uncle that sits around and spins tales and tells lies and everybody knows he’s lying, but that’s uncle whoever and that’s just the way he is. And you sit there and you listen, you know, and everybody’s got somebody in their family they love to see drunk ‘cause they the funniest thing in the world. . . It had a kind of flavor that would make you really want to see those people again.”

POSTSCRIPT

Since this essay was published, Williams has continued to write for theater, television, and film. His plays include *Eve of the Trial*, *Eyes of the American*, *Friends*, *Last of the Line*, *The Montford Point Marine*, and *Woman from the Town*. He has twice been nominated for an Emmy Award from the Academy of Television Arts & Sciences, and has won the Morgan State University Alumni Award, the Humanitas Award, and the Omega Psi Phi Fraternity Lifetime Achievement Award, among others. He currently serves on the board of the Paul Green Foundation and is affiliated with the theater department at North Carolina Central University in Durham. On the occasion of his induction into the North Carolina Literary Hall of Fame, Williams would like to offer “a special thanks to my mentor and playwriting instructor, Steve Carter.”

“GOVERNOR MADE ME DESTROY MY TELEVISION”

from Woman from the Town. London: Samuel French, 1990.

TIME: December 22-25. The Present.

PLACE: Mason's Bridge, North Carolina. The Wilson Farm.

ACT I, Scene 1

SCENE: Front porch. Early morning.

AT RISE: ROOSTER CROWS as LIGHTS come up on LAURA sitting on her front porch. SHE is decorating a basket with a ribbon. Laura lives in a large farm house that has seen better days. LAURA stands placing basket on rocker, pulls out a letter from pocket - from her sister Lila, looks up the road, crosses SL off porch to DSC. SHE sees her sister, Lila, and her niece Rita, walking towards the house. They just got off the bus from New York. They are not yet on stage. Note: In black, LAURA opens front door.

LAURA: My sister Lila's still got nerves made out of cast iron. Walking up the road like the conquering hero come home. Never thought she'd do it. Coming home with a bastard young'n. (*SHE crosses SR onto porch to SR porch railing and looks at the fields.*) Well, they won't find a pot of gold at the end of this rainbow. Just buckets of my sweat out there in them fields. Foot tubs full of my tears when they all started leaving and ... dying out. (*SHE crosses to SL on porch.*) So don't come back here bringing me no sympathy cards. (*SHE throws the letter on the floor SL of porch steps.*) Dirt under my fingernails. Hands with rope marks in them ... from plowing. Combines taking over everything. Folks selling out. Banks taking over what the big combines don't want. (*SHE crosses to rocker and sits.*) Choking the

small farmer. Turning us into farm house dinosaurs. State Governor lies so bad I don't know if it come natural or he trained for it. Governor made me destroy my television the other night. I threw a hammer through the screen trying to hit him. Told us he wanted to help the ones in need. Soon as I heard the lie ... I killed my television. But he kept right on talking. (*Looking SL at Lila and Rita.*) I didn't pick you up from the bus station. That ought to tell you how bad I want you back here. (*SHE stands looking SL.*) You waited too long, Lila. It's too late. So don't bring me no sympathy cards. (*SHE sits in rocker and picks up basket, continues decorating it.*) We used to have so much fun at holiday time. Warmth all around. Our favorite time of the year. The Wilson sisters. (*SHE hums "Silent Night, Holy Night".*) That was a long time ago. It would take you to mess up my Christmas. (*LAURA closes her eyes and rocks.*)

ACT I, Scene 2

Next day. Later afternoon. LIGHTS come up on LAURA in the parlor.

SHE is dusting beginning with UC table, to UR table, to SR table. As SHE begins to cross SL, SHE notices Lila's jacket and scarf on SR chair back. LAURA crosses to SL table begins to dust, picks up Robert's picture.

LAURA: Damn old man, you still at us even from the grave, ain't ya. You something, I tell you. (*Sits in UC chair.*) Buddy's trailing behind Rita like she's Dorothy Dandridge. I wish I could love you, sister. But I spent too many days shelling peas, feeding hogs, chopping cotton, and plowing. Plowing and walking them long hot rows for so long that sometimes I thought I was a mule. Just me and my boy. (*Replaces picture on table.*) Lila, she's living the high life. I look at my hands sometimes and I want to just scream. Underneath these calluses are soft, warm hands that need to be held. Scars and scratches on arms that need to embrace. There's a woman inside these overalls. (*Rises.*) A woman - no, a lady, damn it!! (*Works area.*) Working! Chopping! Plowing! Pulling! Pulling! Gee to the left mule! Haw to the right! Now giddy-up! Giddy-up, I say. Got to stay straight between the row. Dirt in my shoes. Hot sun burning and blistering skin that should be smooth as brown satin. Screams and screeches that should be soft blues notes played by my hands. Would you like to waltz, Laura? Certainly, Sir. (*Picks up Lila's scarf and dances a little.*) My perfume? I'm glad you like it. Waiter, champagne for my glass. Hell, I can dream, can't I? Because there's a lady underneath these overalls ... a lady that I'll never find again.

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Additional information on Mr. Williams and his work can be found at www.ncwriters.org and in:

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North Carolina Literary Hall of Fame

PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS

Asabi (Stephanie Howard) is an educator, director, playwright, stage manager, and an Assistant Professor of Theatre at North Carolina Central University. Among many credits, Asabi has performed in *Steal Away, Four Queens-No Trump*, and *Having Our Say*. She has directed such shows as *Sarafina*, *Shaking the Mess Outta Misery*, *From the Mississippi Delta*, *Blues for an Alabama Sky*, and *The Amen Corner*. Her original works include *Slappin' God in the Face*, *Celestial Colors of the Cross*, and *Distorted Beauty: Images of African American Achievers*.

Paul Escott was born and raised near St. Louis, Missouri, attended college at Harvard, and came to North Carolina in 1971 to attend graduate school at Duke University. After 14 years at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, he came in 1988 to Wake Forest University, where he is the Reynolds Professor of History. His latest book is *The Confederacy: The Slaveholders' Failed Venture*.

Joseph M. Flora is Atlanta Professor of Southern Culture Emeritus at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He has published widely in the literature of the American South, the American West, and Ernest Hemingway.

Jane Holding grew up in Smithfield, North Carolina, and lives now in Chapel Hill. She has collaborated with Allan Gurganus on many projects, including the stage adaptation of *Oldest Living Confederate Widow Tells All*.

Shippen L. Page, the great-grandson of Walter Hines Page, is an attorney in private practice in Cambridge, Massachusetts. He also was the co-founder, president, and C.E.O. of Intervideo, Inc., a producer of educational videotapes for children. He has served on the boards of a number of civic organizations, including the UNICEF Committee of New England, Cambridge Youth Soccer, Putnam Camp, and Guidance Center, Inc., of Cambridge.

Stephen E. Smith is the author of eight books of poetry and prose and is the recipient of the *Poetry Northwest* Young Poet's Prize, the Zoe Kincaid Brockman Prize for poetry, and four North Carolina Press awards. He lives in Southern Pines, North Carolina, and contributes columns and features to *The Pilot* and *PineStraw* magazine. His most recent book is *A Short Report on the Fire at Woolworths: Selected New and Old Poems 1980-2010*.

North Carolina Literary Hall of Fame

PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS

Melanie R. Soles is the Assistant secretary for Policy, Strategy and Legislative Affairs for the Department of cultural Resources. In her role, Melanie serves as the Department's Chief Legislative Liaison and oversees policy initiatives and is a Senior Staff Advisor to the Secretary of Cultural Resources. Melanie also serves as the Department's Liaison to the N.C. Symphony and the N.C. Museum of Art. She is an experienced civic leader, a former entrepreneur and proponent for cultural and non-profit organizations, and she is the co-founder and former board chair of the Greensboro Children's Museum. Melanie has served on the boards of the Community Foundation of Greater Greensboro; Downtown Greensboro, Inc.; Preservation Greensboro; United Arts council of Greensboro and Charlotte; Weatherspoon Art Gallery; Elon University and Guilford College Board of Visitors and the Junior League of Greensboro.

Ed Williams retired in 2008 after 25 years as editor of the editorial pages at *The Charlotte Observer*. During his 35-year career there, he won numerous awards for writing and widespread recognition for innovation and leadership. His columns and editorials were part of *Observer* projects that won the Pulitzer Prize for Public Service in 1981 and 1988. After his retirement, Governor Mike Easley conferred upon him the Order of the Long Leaf Pine, the state's highest award for service to North Carolina.

J. Peder Zane is a writer and editor who has worked at *The New York Times* and *The News & Observer* of Raleigh. His work has won several national awards including the Distinguished Writing Award for Commentary from the American Society of Newspaper Editors. He has contributed to and edited two books published by W.W. Norton, *The Top Ten: Writers Pick Their Favorite Books* (2007) and *Remarkable Reads: 34 Writers and Their Adventures in Reading* (2004). He is writing a book with Professor Adrian Bejan of Duke University titled *The Law of Life: The Scientific Principle Behind Evolution and Design in Nature*.

North Carolina Literary Hall of Fame

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The **North Carolina Center for the Book** (a program of the State Library of North Carolina, Department of Cultural Resources) was established in 1992 as a state affiliate of The Center for the Book in the Library of Congress to focus public interest on libraries, books, reading, and the literary and cultural heritage of the state. The Center develops and coordinates a wide range of book and documentary film discussion programs for out-of-school adults. Programs are led by college professors and are hosted locally by public libraries and their community partners, expanding the library's role as a community cultural center. www.statelibrary.dcr.state.nc.us/ld/nccftb/cftb.htm

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The late Sam Ragan, editor and publisher of *The Pilot* from 1968-1996, was instrumental in bringing the Literary Hall of Fame to Weymouth and Southern Pines. He was inducted into the Literary Hall of Fame in 1997.

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